

# JUDAISM

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## **THE NINETEEN-EIGHTIES: GOOD OR BAD FOR THE JEWS?**

**Lothar Kahn  
Theodore R. Mann**

**Richard Maass  
Sidney Schwarz**

**Jacques Torczyner**

## **THE EMERGING PERSONALITY OF WOMEN**

**Ruth Rapp Dresner  
Rita M. Gross**

**Freema Gottlieb  
Marc Lee Raphael**

## **HAS SECULAR JUDAISM A FUTURE?**

**Robert Gordis**

**Ben Halpern**

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JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society. Through an exploration of the meaning and needs of the Jewish experience, it hopes to widen the channels of communication between Jews and to affirm Jewish verity and vitality to the world at large.

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# JUDAISM

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

*Judaism* will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

## *The First Reader*

### *Jews in the Eighties*

The start of the new decade of the Eighties is, of course, purely a convention of the calendar. Nonetheless, a noticeable change in the temper of American Jewry has been making itself felt in the recent past. The beginning of the Eighties offers an opportunity to reassess the status of modern Jews and the new prospects that await them.

We have invited a group of distinguished American-Jewish leaders who are intimately involved in the life of the community to share their perceptions of the major problems, perils and possibilities facing us. The large measure of agreement among them suggests that the nature of our problems is not recondite. The differences among them highlight the varying approaches posed for dealing with them.

One overall perspective is offered by *Lothar Kahn* in his paper, "The American Jew in the Eighties." It is a trenchant description of current trends affecting the physical security and spiritual vitality of the Jewish community. The author finds most of the signs disquietingly negative.

That the Jewish community seems to lack power in the world today is a truism, but it is subjected to analysis by *Sidney H. Schwarz* in "Jewish Impotence, Jewish Power." He argues that while Jews obviously represent a weak element in world population, they are by no means bereft of important sources of power, primarily in Israel but also in the Diaspora. He pleads for a greater sense of responsibility in view of this power.

*Jacques Torczyner*, in "Jews in the Eighties: Changing Perspectives for a Changing World" looks at both sides of the scale, weighs the positive and negative factors and makes some valuable suggestions for action. Another evaluation, as seen in the title, "The American Jewish Community of the 1980s: A Different View," is offered by *Richard Maass*, who sees changes for the good ahead, while an unquestionably positive assessment is presented by *Theodore R. Mann* in "Optimism In Realism."

### *Mendelssohn Revisited*

The year 1979 marked the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Moses Mendelssohn. Both as a symbol of the Jew entering into the modern world and as a Jewish thinker and leader, Mendelssohn is one of the most significant figures in the Jewish historical experience. In her paper, "Moses Mendelssohn: Some Reflections on his Thought," *Eva Jospe* highlights certain aspects of Mendelssohn's career that have not always received proper recognition. Her paper is a fitting tribute to a great Jewish figure.

*Women Are People*

The most far-reaching revolution of the twentieth century may well prove to be the movement for women's liberation, various aspects of which are highlighted by other designations like "the new feminism," "the sexual revolution," and "the new morality."

Any fundamental change in the present inevitably calls for a revision of one's perception of the past and one's vision of the future. Four papers in this issue of JUDAISM contribute to this new self-awareness of women.

That the progress toward women's equality has not been smooth and unbroken need not be demonstrated. It is true not only in the political arena, but in the field of religion as well. An obvious case in point has been the swirling controversy with regard to the ordination of women in Conservative Judaism.

There are, however, even deeper theological issues involved, as *Rita M. Gross* points out in her paper, "Steps Toward Feminine Imagery of Deity in Jewish Theology." The use of male language in referring to God is more than a matter of convenience or grammatical usage. She offers a trenchant criticism of the current male-ness characteristic of Jewish prayer and of the Jewish tradition as a whole.

In order to make her point that the male centeredness of Jewish religious thought runs deep and needs to be corrected she proceeds to offer a striking "role reversal." She then suggests five important respects in which a formulation of Godhood as feminine would deepen Jewish faith in our day.

"The Song of Deborah," in the Biblical Book of Judges, which is one of the oldest (if not the oldest) extant specimens of ancient Hebrew poetry, involves three women. They are the prophetess Deborah, the Kenite woman Yael, who kills Sisera, the enemy of the Hebrew Tribes, and Sisera's mother, who waits confidently but in vain for her son's triumphant return. In her paper, "Three Mothers," *Freema Gottlieb* analyzes the role of these totally different women in this episode from Israel's ancient and heroic past.

To leap across the centuries, the Jewish woman activist today has had her forerunners in the past. One of the most interesting is the German-Jewish leader and social worker, Bertha Pappenheim, who is the subject of the paper, "The Work of Bertha Pappenheim," by *Ruth Rapp Dresner*.

Turning to our days, we see that, for nearly a century, American-Jewish women writers have embodied their observations in novels and short-stories. *Marc Lee Raphael*, in his paper, "Female Humanity: American Jewish Women Writers Speak Out," points out how the perception of these sensitive observers has changed during three generations.

*The Prospects for Secular Judaism*

The term "Judaism" is generally conceived, both in the Jewish and the general community, as applicable to the Jewish religion and its various

“denominations” or schools of thought — Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist. The number of American Jews who are religiously affiliated is generally estimated at three million. There are, therefore, some two million who accept none of these designations. Many of them cut all links with the Jewish community and have no concern with any aspect of their Jewish background. They have successfully melted into “the American melting pot,” or think they have.

There are, however, significant numbers of American Jews who have consciously opted for a secular Judaism, that is basically cultural in content and often strongly committed to Jewish group identity in Israel and in the Diaspora.

Because secular Jews include some of our most creative and valuable elements and are a potentially valuable resource for Jewish survival, we have opened the pages of our journal to an exposition of secular Judaism, which has been carried on by *Ben Halpern* and other writers. We now add a further discussion, between him and the Editor of this journal, under the title, “Secular Tradition In Our Day: An Exchange.”

#### *A New Approach to Jewish Theology*

It is generally recognized that the articulation and definition of religious concepts is an indispensable task for a religion that seeks to command the allegiance of intelligent people. *S. Daniel Breslauer* finds that there are two broad types of theological thinking. One seeks to reflect upon, refine, and organize the body of normative religious thought to be found in a given tradition. This he calls “normative theology.” The other begins with the religious experience of the individual, which it also reflects upon, refines, and articulates. This is described as “responsive theology.”

In his paper, “Alternatives in Jewish Theology,” the author comments upon eleven contemporary writers on Jewish theology whom he classifies under the one or the other rubric. Using a moving tale by Micah Yosef Berdichewski, Breslauer argues for the importance of “responsive theology” as against “normative theology.” He urges the value of responsive theology of the individual as a vivifying factor in the normative theology of the group.

#### *Meanings Do Change*

An old saying has it that “Circumstances alter cases.” In a brief paper, “Of All Small Things . . .,” *David R. Blumenthal* offers an illustration of how the massive horror of the Holocaust has affected even such tiny trifles as an English phrase. A deep chasm separates the use of “concentration camp” before Hitler and after him.

R.G.

# *The American Jew in the Eighties*

LOTHAR KAHN

AKIBA, MAIMONIDES, MENDELSSOHN AND perhaps even Buber would be astounded that a dark, flammable liquid, rather than persecution or rabbinic interpretations, would determine Jewish destiny in the 1980s. American Jewish relations with Israel, and with ethnic groups within the United States, as well as internal Jewish life are likely to be affected by the availability of petroleum and by the American government's response to the energy challenge.

The Yom Kippur War changed Jewish and world history. While it enabled Israel to snatch victory from the jaws of disaster, it removed all doubt that the Arabs would not become a formidable fighting force in the future. Worldwide, its effects were even more devastating. By unleashing the oil weapon, the Arabs radically altered the global power picture. The West was materially weakened and permanently threatened — less by the Embargo itself than by the new economic-psychological climate that it created. The Communist East was strengthened, at least temporarily, if for no other reason than that the West was weakened. All of Islam seemed suddenly to awaken out of centuries of slumber. But how was a technologically underdeveloped Islamic world to use never-dreamed-of revenues? New wealth and power generated their own internal strains as modernization and traditional ways clashed head on. One leader of the Islamic world, the Emperor of Iran, has already fallen victim to this tension. Other oil-states, such as Saudi Arabia, are trembling before the revolutionary force of populist strains in Islam. Colonel Khadaffi and Imam Khoumeini, while fearful of Marxism, have combined petrol wealth with revolutionary fervor to reduce liberal America to its oil-size, though the Soviet invasion of Islamic Afghanistan has given some of these gentlemen second thoughts about weakening America further. Equally, the ferment in Islam will affect the future of Israel and the United States.

American dependence on Middle East oil, which restricts its foreign policy options, is almost sure to lead to new and unprecedented demands for Israeli concessions. This country will not renege on its obligations to Israel, but it can no longer ignore Arab power and competing blocs within an energized Muslim world. Whether liberals or conservatives occupy the White House or form a Congressional majority, they appear equally fated to accommodate Arab friends as never before. A Palestinian presence on the West Bank and Gaza, followed eventually by a Palestinian

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LOTHAR KAHN is professor of modern languages at Central Connecticut State College.



state of some kind, seems a foregone conclusion. It is improbable that such a scenario is meaningful without an American military force to keep the peace between Arab and Jew and to bolster regimes that do not wish to be swallowed up by either the Soviet Union or its surrogate states. Such a force in the Middle East would have been unthinkable before the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, but that adventure laid to rest the American psychosis resulting from the Vietnam drama.

In all of this, the time factor is of the essence: if Israel delays too long in acceding to change on the West Bank or Gaza, no agreement may be possible at all. Sadat will fall and a different Egypt will again cause Israel to be virtually encircled. On the other hand, if Israel agrees too quickly to a Palestinian *state* — i.e., before the generations of hate have died out, she is taking an immoderate risk. It is clearly in the interest of both Israel and the United States to push autonomy negotiations forward and to admit the development of an entity — while resisting statehood for at least another ten to twelve years. Moving either too quickly or too slowly carries risks that should not be taken.

With this country becoming more jittery over oil and over its own economic decline, American Jews will be severely put to the test. They cannot, in the future, rubberstamp any and all policies of the Israeli government. The old argument that that government (or even individual Israeli citizens) must know best because they are close to the scene, will have to be balanced by the opposing argument that American Jews, from the greater distance, have a superior perspective that dictates the survival of a friendly Egypt, establishment of relations with moderate Arab states, and assistance in the overthrow of religious-revolutionary fanatics of the ilk of Khadaffi and Khoumeini. Continued support of the State of Israel must be geared toward long-range survival, not to the particular policies of a transient, short-lived government. Thus, American Jews cannot, in the future, afford to buttress almost mechanically questionable enterprises such as Jewish settlements where they have no business being. Such settlements, and American Jewish support for them, can only postpone a plausible solution. Israeli officials must be made aware, not publicly, to be sure, that such a policy is detrimental both to their interests as well as to those of Israel's chief protector in the West.

\* \* \*

Thirty plus years of Israel's existence have brought about salutary results for all Diaspora Jewries, but, also, some possibly negative fallout. The benefits have been amply discussed over the years: the establishment of a Jewish state made Jewish survival possible and bearable after the Holocaust; it bolstered Jewish pride against the age-old charge of Jewish physical cowardice, philistinism, neurotic intellectuality; it stiffened Jewish backbone and bolstered a timorous *galut* mentality; it unified world Jewry as did little else in modern Jewish history. Nothing can diminish these benefits which are of overriding significance.

But there have been disappointments. One has been the failure of Israel, totally immersed as it is in security needs and economic stress, to serve as a cultural beacon to the Diaspora Jewries. Such an expectation was perhaps unreasonable in the first place, but it did attract to the Jewish state those who had reservations about another political nationalism. An actual negative result has been the centering of so much of Jewish life and education around Israel, reducing Jewish existence largely to interest in, and support of, the young state at the cost of other Jewish concerns which for centuries have insured Jewish survival. Should Israel replace the synagogue, the local community, Jewries physically close and in some distress? Should all eggs be put in one basket and a basket which, with all protective care, is still in danger of being stolen away?

It appears that the American Jewish community is not in the same good shape it was in at the onset of the sixties and seventies. American Jews are still free and vigorous, more uninhibited about their Jewishness than any Jews in the Diaspora present or past, but they seem vaguely more apprehensive. Perhaps it is just the malaise that intrudes from the general community; perhaps it is linked to the particular Jewish-Israeli connection with the energy crisis; perhaps it is the general feeling that the postwar generation which witnessed the Hitler years, the Holocaust and the establishment of the Jewish state is dying out. Perhaps it is the fact that the younger generation (and especially the youngest) suffers from the limitation of Jewishness that is bounded by support for Israel on one side and the memory of the Holocaust on the other — and a large, disquieting vacuum in between.

Hebrew school curricula over the past decade, like all curricula, have centered about student wants, not needs. Students wanted Israel, were stimulated by its uniqueness, enjoyed the vicarious heroism and achievement, the exoticism and excitement of trips and encounters with a different, yet related, culture. They were motivated to learn about the Holocaust, the moral issues that it posed, the conception and fact of total evil, the specificity of Jewish suffering, the need for introspection, especially the disturbing, if unjustified, question, of why Jews let it happen. The Holocaust is a part of the Jewish past, its most horrid recent aspect, but for purposes of education it cannot be divorced from the totality of Jewish history. Knowledge of modern history, even in its broad contours, is so weak that Israel and Holocaust are little islands of awareness, unrelated to any broader conceptions of the Jewish condition and of Jewish destiny.

Some malaise surely stems from the astonishment at the hostility toward Jews among Black leaders. No single group so consistently endorsed the Civil Rights movement as did the Jews and their leaders, a fact acknowledged by Blacks — including the Jesse Jacksons and others who have hobnobbed with the PLO, who have expressed solidarity with Palestinians as the truly oppressed, and have been dismissive of Jewish defense

postures as the guises of the oppressor. In the Black perception, Jews were immensely supportive while the Black struggle centered about political rights; they ceased to be helpful when the struggle moved to the economic arena. At that point, conflicts of interest clouded the previous relationship. Part of the problem issued from the different views of a quota system in schooling and employment. For Jews a quota had always meant exclusion, but for Blacks it signified inclusion. Jews challenged any number of governmental practices as unconstitutional while Blacks discerned in them their prime hope for leaving the slums and ghettos. When increasing resentments and tensions culminated in open Black support for the PLO — the genuinely pacific intent of some Black leaders is beyond question — an open break was averted only through skillful behind-the-scenes manoeuvring. Certainly, strained relations and uneasy co-existence seem in the offing in the decade to come.

There is certainly the malaise that derives from the discovery that old socio-political positions are no longer viable and that new ground is not easily broken. Foreign and internal developments alike have pushed Jews, much against their traditions and inclinations, into a more conservative stance. Many Jews, always Left of center, allied first in the past century to Liberal movements, then later to Socialist parties, suddenly find themselves in the enemy camp. Israel, ruled for nearly all of her history by socialist governments, has been continuously denounced by socialist leaders everywhere. Not a day passes in the Soviet and satellite press without some vigorous attack on the Zionist-imperialist foe of socialism. The same equation of Israel with imperialism has taken hold of the underdeveloped Afro-Asian world, which has consistently sided with hostile Arabs against Israel, notwithstanding the latter's generous technical help in earlier decades. Inside the United States, Blacks, Liberal Protestants, radical students, all those at the far end of the political spectrum have been responsible for the same equation of Zionism with imperialism. From there it seems but one short step to the view of Jews as being engaged in an oppressive struggle against inner city "have-nots." Only the American labor movement, conservative as labor movements go, is still part of the progressive alliance fashioned by Franklin Roosevelt and in which Jews played a vital part. The Left of old has broken down and the New Left has little use for Israel or her American-Jewish "wealthy pushers."

Jews, taught the need for self-preservation by the Holocaust, will no longer preside — under any conditions — over their own destruction or the diminution of their influence and power. But where to go? The eighties appear a decade when American Jewry, by and large, will try to stake out new political ground, perhaps in the middle, belonging to a conservative democratic or liberal republican segment of either party. Whether, in the light of new threats, their old commitment to social justice (their secularized God), can retain its erstwhile strength remains to be seen.

A third malaise, an import from the general society, pertains to the laxity of standards and the relativization of all values. "Do it, if it makes you feel good," the supremacy of *numero uno*, "if others are entitled, so are you," have all resulted in a chorus of egotism, rationalizations for dishonesty and even crime. The voices of religious leaders have been neither loud nor vigorous. They may also have been muted by skepticism about their own power, as religion has been relegated increasingly to Friday night and Saturday morning attendance, if that, and to exercises relating to birth, marriage and death. There is disquieting evidence that those in leading public positions have fallen in with the dominant mood, as one scandal follows in the wake of the other. And the media, reporting on the misdeeds of public figures, often commit serious misdeeds themselves. For a sensational story, the old-time scoop, their own glorification, or those of their newspapers or networks, they will jeopardize reputations, investigations, national security, and even peace negotiations. The pendulum between individual wishes and a sense of obligation to the public good has swung wildly toward the former, and the demand for rights has overshadowed any notion of privilege or duty.

It is true that similar "moral complaints" may be gleaned from the literature of other times. But while there was always some evidence for a crisis of morality, or of education, or religion, objective manifestations have never been as readily discernible as now. Today we know how many families have been dissolved, how many unwanted and irresponsible pregnancies have existed and in what age-groups; we know the number of drug cases, alcohol-induced accidents and crimes; we have statistics about wife-abusers, husband-abusers, child-abusers. Perhaps these and other social evils also existed in other times; it is doubtful, if for no other reason than that the statistical art was less fully developed. But it is doubtful, of course, for other reasons as well: societies were less complex; there were more stabilizing forces; there were some moral absolutes and fewer apologists who generated quiet and soothing explanations.

The Jewish family is crumbling; the use of drugs and alcohol is increasing; sexual aberrations are more numerous. Anxious parents, where they are together, count on available counselors to solve their problems and their children's, thereby contributing to the abdication of their own authority and responsibility. Jews, too, have become masters of the "me first" morality. Any guilt resulting from overindulgence can always be assuaged by the philanthropic act at a moment chosen by the penitent.

Where is the rabbi in this moral wasteland? A bewildered parent may send a troubled youngster to him, as one of many counselors to choose from, but, wisely knowing his limitations, he will cross-refer him to a psychiatrist, psychologist, marriage counselor — whoever may be indicated. While such service is valuable, the rabbi's teaching function — i.e., to call attention to standards that prevent trouble — is more threatened

than ever. The mystique of the rabbi is lost. He is known to be human, the paid agent of a tradition, himself — or members of his family — frequently beset by troubles shared by other families. Rarely, in this complex world, is he granted a chance for that exemplary life which could serve as an instructive example of human behavior. Holiness and the modern rabbi, at least in the congregant's view, were divorced a long time ago.

It would appear that only a cataclysm of sorts will bring back a need for standards, the religion that once helped set them, the rabbis who used to teach and interpret them. A religious revival as such, not even in the social form in which it appeared in the fifties, is not likely to recur without powerful outside circumstances to effect major changes. A wave of anti-Semitism, neither to be wished nor anticipated, could bring about a redirection.

It could also — and alone — arrest the assimilationism which is now rampant. It is, curiously, an assimilationism without an awareness of itself. Unlike earlier assimilated generations, especially in Western Europe, young American Jews may not have religion as the residual mark of fallback for their Jewishness, since their religion appears to have no more impact on them than does Christianity on their Christian-fellow students. They seem attracted to a variety of secular gods: socialism with a human face, different forms of humanism, occasionally radical and revolutionary movements. If they are attracted to more specifically religious movements, they are likely to be of the lunatic fringe kind, with just a tinge of the kinky in them. It has been true of young Jews in the post-emancipation century to be critical of all that was old and uncritically receptive to whatever was new or not yet in existence.

While formal conversions to some other faith are virtually nonexistent, intermarriage seems on a rampage. Love for a human being is placed ahead of all other considerations — his, hers, theirs. Intermarriage is not a revolt against Judaism; it is only a reordering of priorities along "modernist" lines. No one should really expect that this trend will be arrested by Hebrew school education or intense forms of Jewish upbringing. Defenses are not likely to hold up in an age in which, though every group enunciates lofty ideals of brotherhood, humanity, etc., the love marriage, based on chemistry, feeling and compatibility, has become the only basis for — and form of — marriage.

What can be done? Maintain opposition, if for no other reason than not making it too easy. Then, if the couple persist, try to encourage conversion to Judaism. The time for a reassessment of attitudes has come. The Jewish community, which has shrunk steadily since 1940, cannot afford many more numerical losses; a positive approach to conversion can help cut them. To speak in numerical terms seems callous, but Jewish survival is a physical as well as a national, cultural and spiritual fact.

Proselytism has justly been anathema to Jews in the past, but there exists a wide gap between proselytizing and eagerness to embrace a faith.



Rejecting those who, for whatever reason, are attracted to Judaism and plead for acceptance could be construed as still another aspect of Jewish exclusivism. The 1980s should show a friendlier face to those who might wish to join a diminishing clan.

The new decade is also likely to see a crisis of Jewish organizations, since the money crunch is almost certain to reduce their resources. The priority of Israel will leave even less for American Jewish efforts. Though synagogues are not apt to see their grandest and expansionist days, they may yet get through the crisis unscathed, but cultural and social organizations are liable to bear the brunt of the cut-back.

The Golden Age of Jewish literature in America is over. Though the seventies produced two Jewish Nobel Prize-winning authors, novels of Jewish content seem to become fewer — and decidedly less good. The stars of that Golden Age, the sixties, are approaching their late years and young writers of Jewish birth have not addressed themselves to Jewish life in the same way. Perhaps that Jewish life today is too amorphous for all but the greatest writers to find a literary expression for it. A trend may be developing where writers with Jewish interests turn to the past, whether distant or more recent, to generation-oriented history. The Jewish historical novel, if it does indeed develop, would almost surely have nostalgic overtones — for a time when life was simpler (though also dramatic and threatening), but where values (though often equally wrong), were standards by which people lived or which they thought worthy of rebelling against.

Contributions by Jews to the arts and sciences, independent of Jewish content, are almost certain to be even more impressive than in the past decades. American Jews are educated as few groups before them anywhere in the world, and out of this vast mass of potential, Jewish achievement in all domains — creative and scholarly — should be dramatic.

It is improbable that the shortness of money for education will allow the further proliferation of programs of Jewish study. Certainly the manpower has been developed to teach the courses; students, however assimilated, may wish to shop around in the educational department stores and buy some courses of Jewish content, but whether universities, on their own or with the support of more financially hard-pressed Jewish organizations, can maintain the present level of offerings is a matter of hope.

In the sixties it was possible to anticipate further growth in most facets of American Jewish life. There was little reason, even at the onset of the seventies, to question additional development. The American Jew was becoming ever more secure, contented, affluent, with few economic areas off-limits to him. The most prestigious schools were open to his children; conspicuous luxury was matched with equally conspicuous charity; there was even a hint that he wanted to enrich himself culturally — and he did.

These gains are not threatened by a bleaker outlook for the eighties.

But further gains in most areas are unlikely. Shortages of the dark, flammable liquid have already created — and will continue to create — problems which will affect the Jew more seriously than others. They will affect him politically and economically. The same oil has created problems for Israel which will directly and immediately circumscribe the political and personal choices of the American Jew. Basically, the security and welfare of the American Jew in the eighties will vary with the power, strength, confidence and welfare of America.

Internally, the house of Judaism looks older somehow in 1980, mustier, less sturdy. It also looks less distinctive, and a glance inside would reveal trouble and turmoil not present in the past two decades. While not without hope and opportunity, the eighties are apt to offer more difficult and threatening challenges for the American Jew than he has faced since the 1940s.

# *Jewish Impotence – Jewish Power*

SIDNEY H. SCHWARZ

THE DISCUSSION OF ISRAEL-DIASPORA RELATIONS, in recent years, has moved from one of theoretical musings to one of heightened urgency and even despair. While the Israeli government has sought to maintain the facade of the ever-right, ever-injured party, American Jews have cut back on their one-time unqualified support of Israeli policy. Despite concerted attempts in some quarters of the American Jewish community to keep dissenters in line, there is an unfortunately widening rift between American Jews and Israel.

Beginning with the emergence of Breira and its subsequent victimization by the Jewish press in the mid-1970s, to the more recent American efforts on behalf of *Shalom Achshav*, it has become clear that no calls for loyalty by Israel will stem the tide of dissent. Leaders of American Jewry will continue to write their letters to the *New York Times* even as serious reservations grow on the grassroots level regarding Israel's actions on settlements, confiscation of Arab land, and raids into Lebanon. Most Jews continue to support Israel, though it is with a growing sense of unease. While only the most recent crises tend to hold our attention, the list of Israel's actions that have been unpopular with the international diplomatic community, the U.S. government and diaspora Jewry (respectively if not simultaneously) is too long for any friend of Israel to recount without either a sense of resignation or the adoption of an increasingly hard line. Further coloring the reaction of diaspora Jewry toward Israel is its sensitivity to the manner in which their respective standings as a minority in their own countries are affected by any given Israeli foreign policy decision. All of this is met in Israel by utter exasperation and incredulity since it appears to Israelis that, particularly, American Jews have been duped by Arab propaganda and are betraying their support of the Jewish state.

If we, as American Jews, are to be able to continue to speak of world Jewry and the centrality of Israel in a meaningful way, then a dialogue must be opened up between Israel and the diaspora to discuss those things that unite and divide us. Only in this way can both parties come to terms with the considerable differences that exist, and strive to overcome them in the name of Jewish unity. To continue to minimize the differences, or cover them up by repressing dissent, can lead only to disaster.

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SIDNEY H. SCHWARZ is rabbi of Reconstructionist Congregation Beth Israel, Media, Pa.

A few years ago I spoke with an Israeli who denied any connection between Jewish history in the diaspora and the founding of the State of Israel. A little probing made it clear that his view was less informed with any historical insight than with a desire to sever all connections between Israel and the stereotypical meek and powerless Jew living in another country. Everyone who has visited Israel has encountered this heightened expression of machismo which seems to be a compensation for centuries of oppression. In fact, Israel has forged a new character type that faces adversity with defiant resolve and challenge with a rugged pioneering spirit. This image of power projected by Israel has done much to increase the sense of Jewish self-respect worldwide.

What is ironic about this image of power is that it masks a great sense of vulnerability. After every stay in Israel I am left with a much stronger impression of Jewish impotence than of Jewish power. My mind dwells on Yad Vashem and not on *Zahal* (the Israeli Defense Forces). In his speeches, Menachem Begin rarely fails to make allusions to the Holocaust and he showed how paramount is that experience in his own mind when he insisted that Sadat visit Yad Vashem on his first trip to Jerusalem. The Israeli press carefully details the oppression of Jews around the world. Israelis, when making a case to tourists for *aliyah*, underscore the precariousness of Jewish life in the diaspora.

The American reaction to all of this is polite interest that is a cover for a deeper skepticism. As Americans, Jews have been conditioned by a sense of optimism and a belief in fair play. American Jews will stubbornly refuse to hear out any gloomy predictions about their status in the United States and they have well programmed replies to anyone who dares broach the subject. (A good example was the reaction to, and the reviews of, Hillel Halkin's *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*, which offered just such predictions.) Their faith in fair play puts many Jews closer to the American administration's view on settlements, Palestinian rights and raids into southern Lebanon than to the Israeli stance. From an American standpoint, the promise of a head of state on matters of borders, security and peace is to be taken at face value. Israel's skepticism over such "progress" is viewed by American Jews as paranoid and intransigent. When Israel defies international sanctions or persists in policies that anger her only ally, both the American administration and the Jewish community cry in exasperation, though the latter's cry is muffled for propriety's sake.

In the long run, however, propriety will not remain effective as a deterrent to the growing rift between American Jews and Israel. There is a basic lack of understanding between both sides about the nature of Jewish impotence and Jewish power and how it relates to their respective situations. If we speak of, and believe in, a mutuality in Israel-diaspora relations, we must bring these issues to the fore and discuss them openly. I believe that however acrimonious the debate between parties may be-

come, it is essentially a lovers' quarrel that can be resolved through a marriage counselor and not a lawyer. To postpone the dialogue is certain to invite the more irreparable split.

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The greatest failure from the American Jewish side of the issue is the failure to relinquish our conception of Israel as an underdog. We have yet to forgive Israel for winning so decisive a victory in 1967. In addition, Israel's insistence on retaining the captured territories and her ever higher military profile has caused American Jews considerable discomfort. Though American Jewish support of Israel before 1967 was equivocal, the military threat posed by Nasser's mobilization and blockade of Tiran in June of that year produced the most unquestioned support ever offered to Israel. American Jews responded as if their own futures were threatened.

Though the threat to Israel's existence was significantly greater in the 1973 war, no comparable support was forthcoming. The lightning victory of 1967 established Israel as the reigning power of the Middle-East. For Jews living in America, Israel's show of strength was a source of great pride and led to a Jewish renaissance of sorts. Israel's show of power was reassuring to a generation of Jews yet living in the shadow of the Holocaust. I remember how important this impressive victory was to me as a student in an ethnically mixed high school. The Jewish stock soared and other ethnic groups had to become the butt of jokes for a while. Yet only for a short time could American Jews find pride in Israel's strength. Their basic antipathy to power and hawkishness quickly made them uncomfortable with Israel as a military occupying power. More precisely, as a minority sensitive to their image, Jews could see the importance of showing that they were nobody's doormat, but to flaunt the strength that was initially the source of pride was out of the question. Every minority group that tests the water of the majority culture knows the basic rule — be better than everyone else but don't advertise the fact. Israel could never repeat the exciting victory of 1967 because she never again became the underdog. Once Israel lost that underdog status, Jewish unequivocal support vanished and the tide of world opinion turned.

Israel has always been much better at fighting wars than at handling the public relations game that has become a key feature of today's *realpolitik*. World opinion is fickle and Israel's lack of patience with catering to it has exacted a great price. If Israel would not perpetuate the role of the underdog darling of the world — and she has not — then she would have to proceed with the policy of "might makes right." Thus, in the face of a constantly bad press and the loss of credibility throughout the world, Israel has stood her ground by the sheer determination to do anything militarily required to ensure her security. That the sanctions against Israel have gained her a pariah status in the world arena seems to faze Israel not



one bit. The government decided long ago that survival had to take precedence over popularity.

Lack of popularity does, however, faze American Jewry considerably. We often talk about the defensive posture of the immigrant generation of Jews, but no less do we continue to function with a pronounced minority complex. The response to the Six-Day war exhibited precisely to what extent Jews needed an image booster. The converse, though, is also true. As Israel's stock has fallen, first in the Third World, then in the United Nations and now, finally in the U.S., American Jews have grown uncomfortable with the Israel-Jewish connection that exists in the public mind. American-Jewish criticism of Israeli policy has increased in proportion to this discomfort.

For years, the typical Israeli response to diaspora criticism has been that as long as we are not sending our boys to die, or taking our families to a frontier settlement, we have no right to an opinion on matters of military policy. Here the Israelis are only partially correct. We have no right to offer or criticize policy because nobody with a minority mentality can begin to understand matters of national self-interest and sovereignty. We are too much interested in image and acceptance to have an objective view of Israeli security needs. If the minority mentality of American Jewry is uncomfortable with the persistently hard negotiating stance of Israel, that is clearly our problem and not Israel's. Of course, that does not make our discomfort less real, but if it is recognized it should at least prevent us from projecting the need for a policy change on Israel and allow us to begin to cope with a problem which is entirely of our own making.

Because Israel is a key component of American-Jewish identity, we want to make her conform to our own perceptions and expectations, many of which are not only unrealistic but self-contradictory: Israelis should be religious but not fanatically Orthodox; Israel should allow internal dissent but all Israelis should serve happily in the army; Israel should treat minorities equally but must prevent Arabs from achieving a majority; Israel should be secure but should not build settlements in the occupied territories. Nowhere have our perceptions and expectations been more rudely disturbed than in the explosion of the myth of Israel as a refuge for world Jewry. As Russian Jews continue to opt for the United States over Israel and as Israelis fill the streets of New York, American Jews renege on their UJA pledge because the Promised Land has broken its promise to them. The entire complex of Israel-diaspora mutuality and support is about to collapse under the weight of the great Israeli myth that has been carefully cultivated over the years. This is really a series of myths, because fund raisers understand that money comes in when Israel is perceived as whatever the donor wants to perceive. As the day of reckoning approaches and the myths topple one by one, diaspora Jews begin to ask why — a question disallowed under the old rules of Israel-diaspora relations.

Still, the greatest myth has yet to be exploded. Diaspora Jewry continues to believe that the establishment of a Jewish homeland marked the acceptance of Jews into the community of nations and the brotherhood of man. After centuries of homelessness and an alien status, Jews now had a place that they could call home. In the mental acrobatics which we call Jewish identity, diaspora Jews have not only reconciled the existence of Israel with their continued existence in the diaspora, but have enjoyed certain dividends because of Israel's achievements. But now that fewer dividends are being paid, we have become disoriented.

Ironically, this is a dilemma entirely of our own making; Israel stands guiltless. Israel has told us all along that statehood brought no miraculous acceptance of the Jew. She has continued to be skeptical of all nations as she has been isolated diplomatically. She has warned Jews the world over of the dangers which they face in gentile cultures as anti-Semitism continues and is fueled by anti-Zionism. In fact, Jewish statehood has changed nothing for Jews except that they can now legitimately fight for their survival in their own state instead of apologizing for their existence. Israel never promised normalization for world Jewry; she only stated that it is good to die for one's country. From the first day of independence, Israel continually sounded the bell of vulnerability.

If there is one message that American Jews do not want to hear it is the reminder of their vulnerability. Just as the tourist in Israel mocks his host for speaking the unspeakable about the Jewish future in America, so the American Jewish community as a whole rejects the argument that the only safe place for a Jew is in the Jewish homeland. Little has changed since the days of Herzl when Western support for Zionism consisted of funding so that others might emigrate to Palestine. One must tread softly on this turf lest we wake the memory of Ben-Gurion who said straightforwardly that the only true Zionist is the one who came on *aliyah*. Yet we must admit honestly that behind our support of Israel lies something of an insurance policy on our Jewish future. Our difficulty with Israel is that we are not prepared to accept a reality that her existence testifies to: that the Jew is alone in the world and closer to destruction than anyone will admit. Behind the facade of Israeli power is the utter impotence which is shared by Jews the world over. Now is not the time for magnanimous gestures, unilateral withdrawals or faith in treaties.

Now, then, it is said. Truth to tell, American Jews would like Israel to be more accommodating to the peace process because it would underscore our optimism in the future that we all hope for but do not really believe in. Truth to tell, Israelis have always been skeptical and pessimistic about the fate of the Jew in a gentile world for reasons that a study of Jewish history will bear out, and they have been, and continue to be, right. Truth to tell, American Jews live in a fantasy world that may suit them fine but that cannot guide Israeli foreign policy. American Jews must stop setting their own optimistic and naive standards by which to judge Israeli

policy and must allow Israel to operate in her own self-interest. There is sufficient debate on policy within Israel to act as a check on rash and shortsighted decisions. We must allow Israel to exercise her power because her barometer that measures chances of Jewish survival is much more sensitive and accurate than ours.

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All of the above should not be construed as a warning to American Jews to abstain from any comment or criticism of Israel. A vital and sharp dialogue must be maintained between us if we want to continue to see world Jewry as a united entity. While I suggest that the dialogue be circumscribed with regard to security issues, I would plead for even more vigorous discussion of another dimension of Israeli life that also revolves around the issue of Jewish power.

It has been suggested that one lesson of the Holocaust is that Jews should never again be so weak as to invite oppression; a strong Israel and a powerful Jewish people is virtually a moral imperative in the wake of our near annihilation during the second world war. Certainly Israel has taken that lesson to heart and has shown herself to have the ability and willingness to protect Jews the world over. Yet, during my last two visits to Israel, I was struck by the price that this powerfulness has exacted from the character of Jewish life.

Students of societies and political systems have long commented on the corrupting and self-destructive nature of power. Not only are Jews susceptible to the contagion of power, but we may be more prone than others, owing to our inexperience in the possession of it. Israel's acquisition of some modicum of power over her adversaries, both inside and outside her borders, has led to actions that seriously threaten not only the democratic but also the Jewish character of the state.

The movement to re-establish a Jewish homeland had both political and spiritual advocates. The political Zionists behind Herzl felt the paramount need for a homeland to provide a territorial refuge for the oppressed of our people. The spiritual Zionists, led by Aḥad Ha-am, saw in the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland the opportunity for a renaissance of Judaism and the values that it represented. Eventually, historical necessity dictated a greater emphasis on the former view and the military and security concerns attending it. The Israeli government still claims that many of the problems in Israel today must be overlooked because of the greater urgency of the security issue. Thus, now as in its infancy, Zionism has sacrificed spiritual for political concerns.

It is time to stop and inquire why this must be so, and the question can, and must, come from the diapsora.

Here is not the place to investigate in depth the role that Jews have played in the history of civilization. Let me simply state that Jews have been more sensitive to injustice within societies because it either affected

them first or was likely to affect them eventually. While some would see this view as self-serving, I think it no cause for shame. Certainly, Jews are not more ethically motivated because of any genetic superiority. The combination of Jewish ethical teaching and Jewish impotence always required Jews to fix their antennae on the moral bearing of the ruling powers. That Jews in the modern world remain more heavily represented in liberal and humanitarian causes than other groups is a direct result of their historical experience. There are many Jews for whom the sum total of their "Jewishness" is the compelling obligation to protect and defend that which is morally right.

As a Jew, I take no small pride in this fact. But I startled myself when, in my last visit to Israel, I found myself saying that I could be more true to the ethical aspects of the Jewish tradition by living outside Israel than inside it. I had become convinced that Israeli society as a whole had become so accustomed to living with the power of the majority that it had forgotten the plight of the weak which was until so recently its own predicament.

When I expressed this view Israelis were outraged and quick to point out that I was talking about a country of survivors — those who had lived through the most awful exercise of oppression that the world has ever seen. And I know that it is precisely that experience which has led to a national resolve never again to become impotent. The acquisition and exercise of power was, without a doubt, a national imperative for the Jewish people after the Holocaust, but learning the distinction between its use and its abuse has been much more difficult. For Israel, the problem is not so much the willful oppression of the weak; rather, Israel's problem is a moral callousness that results from a lack of awareness that she does, in fact, have power. It is similar to the danger of wielding a weapon while being unaware of its true capacity for destruction. Because the experience of near annihilation is so recent, Israel still functions as though she were powerless and, thus, justifies any action to survive. This defensiveness makes it difficult to live up to the responsibilities that are incumbent on the possessor of power.

The resulting moral callousness has several manifestations. At every level of Israeli society one can find a startling level of prejudice. There is a relative pecking order of Israelis based on country of origin. The Ashkenazim, though a minority now, still stand on the upper end of the social ladder, with the Sefardim below. Of course, Israelis will tell you that there are better Sefardim and worse Sefardim, depending on their nationality, but the subtleties of this prejudice can be spared here. Lest there be an impression that color dictated this prejudice it should be mentioned that the consensus of Israelis is that there is no group as degenerate as the Soviet Georgians.

This attitude is mild when compared with the one reserved for the Arabs. I speak now of Israeli Arabs who were once cited as the potential

bridge between the surrounding nations and the Jews. As the threat of an Arab majority in Israel grows (it already obtains in the Galilee), so does the hostility between groups. The government has helped raise the educational level of Israeli Arabs who, in turn, have only become more articulate and vocal in their support for the PLO. Israel sees therein a betrayal of its well-intentioned efforts, so that today there is less receptivity to Jewish-Arab dialogue than ever before, and the subsequent alienation of Arabs and the intolerance of Jews feed on each other.

There was recently some publicity about the "overzealousness" of the Israeli armed forces in military operations. *Moment* magazine ran an article by an Israeli soldier who was filled with self-recrimination over tossing a tear gas canister into a class of Arab children and then blocking the door. While such incidents can be understood as the result of the high risk anxiety that comes with battle, their frequency is sufficient to force a second look at the moral consequences of a twelve-year military occupation on those who must keep the peace. One is reminded of Golda Meir who said that she could forgive the Arabs for killing Israelis but never for having turned the Israelis into killers.

Even in Israel's day-to-day transactions one must be shocked at the atmosphere which has bred a total breakdown in honesty and respect for law. Israelis cheat the government as well as each other, and one is more startled by the general acceptance of this state of affairs than for its occurrence. As a minority, Jews have always been diligent about tending to the moral deviants in their community lest they, themselves, be a burden on the majority culture. In Israel, that concern is lacking; the view is that everybody is Jewish and everybody cheats.

In sum, the moral temper of Israel is hardly what one would expect from a country that was to be a "light unto the nations." I do not think that the phrase is corny and I disagree with Israelis who tell diaspora Jews not to put that onus upon them. Once we allow Zionist ideals to be compromised to a point where "normalization" is the only goal, we turn our back on everything that Israel can, and should, be. Many of the ills that beset Israeli society are understandable, under the circumstances, and many Israelis say that those circumstances are sufficient to excuse those ills. But here, in the ethical sphere, the diaspora perspective is the better one. While Israelis have been conditioned to a slow deterioration in values in their country and rationalize it away to prevent any corrective action, Jews the world over can evaluate the moral condition of the country from a more objective viewpoint.

The prophets of the Biblical tradition criticized Israelite society from a perspective outside of that society. The disregarded needs of the orphan, the widow and the poor became obvious to those who stood beyond the corrupted system, not to those who were part of it. Similarly, diaspora Jewry can fulfill a vital task. Jews must look to the ethical values of their tradition, hold them aloft and say to Israel, "this is what must guide your



development as a nation.” The moral callousness that inevitably results from years of having power over others must be checked by those who are unquestioned supporters of Israel but are also concerned with the quality of her national life.

I realize full well how delicate is the balancing act that I am proposing for diaspora Jewry. We must give Israel elbow room in negotiations regarding security because our own political perspective is too much influenced by our minority complex and our ignorance of the real threat to Israel's survival. By the same token, however, we must be vocal in criticizing Israel for moral failures. We need not dismiss the security concerns of Israel to insist that security not be used as a smokescreen for every other problem within Israeli society. Of late, Israel-diaspora relations have suffered from a polarization of opinions. Some say that world Jewry may voice its dissent from Israeli policy, while others demand silent and unqualified support. Neither side listens to the other. Because I believe in the partnership of world Jewry and Israel as well as in the centrality of Israel for the future of Jewish life, I believe that the dialogue must be conducted within certain parameters. American Jews must heed Israel's warning and lesson about Jewish impotence and not let a false sense of security lull us into foolish and naive mistakes. Yet Israel must also begin to heed a new message which we hope will emanate from Jews the world over: power is a tool that may be as destructive of its possessors as of its victims. This must be the new covenant for Israel-diaspora relations. Jews do need power to survive and they should never again be without it. But power does not justify itself; alone, it makes a nation brutal and sterile. It is time to re-introduce the language and visions of spiritual Zionism and have them inform the Israel-diaspora dialogue. If Israel is not soon to be accepted as a “light unto the nations” let us at least help her become a light unto ourselves.

# *Jews in the Eighties: Changing Perspectives for a Changing World*

JACQUES TORCZYNER

THE 1970s WAS AN ERA OF CHANGES. SOME of these were abrupt and drastic; many were so gradual that they passed unnoticed at the time. But their overall effect was profoundly to alter the alignments, and even the balance of power, throughout the world. It is vitally important for the Jewish community in 1980 to reassess its position in light of these changes, to make the most of our opportunities and to avoid potential difficulties.

The most dramatic event of the decade, at least for Jews, was the Yom Kippur War, which demonstrated the essential vulnerability of Israel's position. Considered invincible following the Six Day War of 1967, she was nearly overrun in 1973. In the aftermath of the shock, two salient facts emerged: the precariousness of Israel's geographic situation, vastly outnumbered and almost completely encircled as she is by enemy states; and her total dependence upon the good will of the United States. It was fortunate that at the time of crisis the President of the United States was Richard M. Nixon, who fully appreciated the strategic and moral importance of Israel's survival. It was he who saw to it that Israel received the supplies that were so desperately needed for defence.

As we enter the 1980s, Israel remains vulnerable, her flanks exposed despite the signing of a peace treaty with Egypt. However, the quality of American leadership has deteriorated both in its ability to deal with external forces and in its commitments to Israel. Indeed, it appears that only the fear of the Jewish vote prevented the Carter administration from abandoning Israel, as it had already done with Taiwan.

After twenty-nine years of Labor Party rule, 1977 saw the election of a new government in Israel as the Likud bloc, under the leadership of Menachem Begin, assumed power. Subsequently, a transformation took place, both on the national political scene and in the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. The attitude of much of American Jewry vis-à-vis Israeli politics changed markedly, especially after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The very people who, in the past, condemned criticism of the government as disloyalty, if not treachery, have now become outspoken dissenters. They feel entitled to enlist the media

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JACQUES TORCZYNER is a member of the Executive of the WZO, is the president of the World Union of General Zionists and served five terms as president of the ZOA, 1965-1970.

to air their opinions and even to interfere in Israel's internal affairs to promote their views. This trend culminated in the deplorable letter of July 1980, which savaged the leadership and character of the Prime Minister. Signed in Israel by several prominent American Jews, it was given front-page coverage by the *New York Times*. Such actions are being encouraged by the other Israeli factions. In the past, members of the "loyal opposition" never appeared publicly in the Diaspora. We now witness the spectacle of the free world being criss-crossed by highly paid spokesmen of the Mapai, including Yitzhak Rabin, Abba Eban and Shimon Peres, undercutting the Begin government and garnering support for their views, for their party, and, ultimately, for their own political aspirations.

Whatever the makeup of the next government in Jerusalem, this tendency toward political interaction between the Jews of Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora will not be reversed. The genie, once released, will not go back into the bottle. Nor should it, although the need for rational limits ought to be evident. It is important that Jews the world over take an active interest in what happens in Israel. The Jewish state was created not only to serve as a homeland, but also to show the world what our people could achieve on their own. Without the active participation of World Jewry, Israel would become merely another Levantine state.

On the international scene, the post-World War II period of philo-Semitism has ended and anti-Semitism has reappeared, albeit in new and often subtle forms. Feelings of collective guilt for allowing the death of six million Jews have long since abated. In any case, guilt feelings grow burdensome with time and tend to generate resentment against the victim. Add to this the economic blackmail practiced by the Arab oil-producing countries and fear of the P.L.O.-backed terrorism and we see a world ready to make Jews in general, and Israel in particular, the scapegoat.

Between the first and second world wars, Jewish students at Polish universities were forced to occupy segregated "Jewish benches." Today Israel is isolated diplomatically in precisely the same way. She is treated like a pariah in the United Nations, by its agencies, by its Secretary-General, and even by the participants in that recent U.N.-sponsored travesty, the International Conference of Women. A world that finds it expedient to forget the Holocaust, allows the Arab states to demand the destruction of the Jewish state while it tacitly condones their policy of anti-Semitism, thinly disguised as "anti-Zionism." Israel's western allies and those Third World nations whom she has aided in the past fail to befriend her. Even more shamefully, they rationalize their betrayal by trying to shift some of the blame onto Israel herself, hoping that we are naive enough, or insecure enough, to accept it!

We see the resurgence of overtly anti-Semitic acts in France, Germany and elsewhere. More sinister still is the resurrection of the *numerus*

*clausus* in the United States. Given a semblance of legitimacy along with a new name, "affirmative action," this is a more subtle form of anti-Semitism and a more insidious one, for it masquerades as a remedy for social and economic injustice. As such it was at first accepted, and even welcomed, by Jews who have traditionally been concerned with helping the needy. Only recently have the implications of this principle become clear, and only now are American Jews awakening to their danger. For, purporting to atone for past inequities by giving preferential treatment to the victims, it gauges social and economic oppression by race and sex, rather than by socio-economic status. By this semantic sleight-of-hand, "affirmative action" is transformed into a vehicle for a new form of discrimination and, like all of its predecessors, will ultimately operate at the expense of the Jewish community.

Another phenomenon of the seventies was the continued ingathering of Jews to Israel from the far corners of the earth. Most heartening of all was the exodus of Jews from the U.S.S.R., where, though isolated for over sixty years, they have kept their identity, not so much, it is true, through their own determination as through the anti-Semitism of their fellow countrymen and of the Communist regime. The miracle of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union is the most striking vindication of the Zionist idea.

However, during the last two years, we have seen endangered Jewish communities fleeing to other countries of the free world. The problem of the *Noshrim*, the failure of Iranian Jews to escape to Israel, and the emigration of South African and Rhodesian Jews to Canada, Australia and the United States are all examples of this disturbing trend. There are several reasons for it. The knowledge that, through the Law of Return, the doors of Israel are always open, permits the Jewish emigrant to try another country first. Russian anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda accounts for some of the *Noshrim* phenomenon. Basically, however, it is the conditions within Israel itself — lack of housing, the danger of war, and the long period of compulsory military service for the youth — that are the underlying causes of the dropouts and of emigration to other countries.

What, then, are the implications for world Jewry as we enter the new decade? How can we best handle the problems that confront us? First, to face the danger of assimilation, as evidenced by the increase in mixed marriages and the decrease in religious observance, we must concentrate more and more on Jewish education. The Orthodox have taken the lead in this field, both in the United States and elsewhere, by initiating the Hebrew day school movement.\* Until now, efforts to create a system of

\* It should be noted that there are at present over fifty day schools under the auspices of the Conservative movement, organized in the Solomon Schechter Day School system. These include high schools as well. There are also Reform day schools functioning in the United States today. Finally, the Labor Zionist movement sponsors the Kinneret day school in Riverdale, New York — ed.

secular Jewish day schools have failed. At the present time, however, disenchantment with public education is widespread in this country, and there is a trend toward increased government aid to students attending parochial schools. In addition, thousands of Israeli *Yordim* who live here wish to give their children a full Jewish education without creating religious conflicts in their family lives. It is conceivable, therefore, that such schools will begin to appear during the 1980s to meet the demand.

However, Jewish education is not, and should not be, merely for the children. There are increasing numbers of Jews for whom traditional, family-oriented or synagogue-centered activities are inappropriate: college students, childless couples, unmarried and formerly married single people, and the elderly. For these groups and for all others who seek to learn more about their religion to explore and discuss topics of current interest, or just to be with other Jews, we must broaden our education program at all levels. The potential members of the audience are there, if we can attract their attention and meet their needs.

We must also develop the political consciousness of Jews in the free world. In France, the scene of a tremendous anti-government demonstration this past summer, there is, for the first time, talk of a Jewish vote, especially in those constituencies where Jews are concentrated. The recent presidential campaign highlights the importance of the Jewish vote in the United States. However, this vote has heretofore been determined less by specific Jewish interests and more by other concerns. In the past, Jews devoted themselves to correcting injustices throughout society; now they see themselves as targets of anti-Semitism, discrimination and hostility. Having been in the vanguard of the civil rights movement and of liberalism in general, they are turning more to the right as they see the principles for which they fought being turned around and used as weapons against *them*. Thus, the nature and direction of the Jewish vote is changing and this is an encouraging development. We must not exaggerate our political power, but neither should we underestimate it. We must, instead, understand how to use it *effectively* to protect our community and to insure the survival of Israel.

We must, most important of all, recognize the dual importance of Israel *and* the Diaspora. Theodor Herzl prophesied that once the Jewish state would be established, those who so wished would go there and the rest would be assimilated and disappear. Although part of his prediction has been fulfilled — millions of Jews have, in fact, emigrated to Israel during the past thirty-two years — the last part has not and, we hope, will not, come to pass. Despite the existence of Israel, many Jews will continue, out of choice, to remain where they are. We must acknowledge this fact and assign equal importance to the survival of the State of Israel and of the Jews of the Diaspora. *Both* should be the prime concern of the 1980s. Indeed, the two are intertwined. It is the existence of Israel that acts as a safety valve, enabling Jews to remain in the Diaspora, knowing that there



is a place to go should their position become untenable, and giving them added importance vis-à-vis their own governments. And it is the Jews of the Diaspora whose aid Israel desperately needs, not only for financial and emotional support, but also as a potent political force influencing their nations' policies. Without the survival of either of these elements, the other is ultimately doomed. And, for the survival of both, there must be recognition by each of the importance of the other and of the need for closer cooperation between them.

To accomplish this, an instrument be created, representing the Jews of the Diaspora and Israel. The World Zionist Organization, the reconstituted Jewish Agency, the World Conference of Jewish Organizations (C.O.J.O.), and the World Jewish Congress have each attempted to play this role. In my opinion, a new organization is needed — one established along democratic lines to represent all the Jews of the free world. It would assume the supervision of fund raising for Israel and, possibly, also, the supervision of general fund raising not performed by the United Jewish Appeal and the Keren Hayesod. It would support Jewish universities and other institutions of higher learning. It would be responsible for *aliyah* and absorption and would take over the present functions of the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee.

Many countries of the free world have central Jewish representative bodies, which could serve as their delegates to this new worldwide organization. Among these are the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Consistoire in France, and the DAIA in Argentina. Unfortunately, the United States, with the largest Jewish community in the world, has no centrally, democratically-selected representative body, although there are several national Jewish organizations fighting for primacy. The Jewish scene in the United States is dominated by local welfare groups, whose control of the funds that are raised makes them a leading force in the community. However, their monies come from a limited group of large contributors and their ultimate power is wielded by those who run them on the local and national levels. During the first and second world wars, the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Conference functioned as the type of organization that I have in mind. The problems which we face, as Jews in the United States and in the world, demand the creation of such a representative body to replace the conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and all other coordinating bodies. Hopefully, the 1980s will see it come to pass.

What will the position of Israel and world Jewry be at the end of this new decade? We have learned throughout history that it is impossible to make predictions. All that is certain is that, in the words of William the Silent, whom Herzl often quoted, "*Rien n'arrive ni comme on le craint ni comme on l'espère.*"\*

\* "Nothing happens as one fears or as one hopes."

# *The American Jewish Community of the 1980s: A Different View*

RICHARD MAASS

IN RECENT YEARS THE AMERICAN JEWISH community has been the object of examination and analysis by sociologists, ethnologists, experts in the field of community relations, the rabbinate, professors in Judaic studies and numerous lay and professional leaders with ready pens, convenient outlets for publication and, presumably, attentive audiences. Depending upon the perspective from which they have written, nearly all of the commentators on the Jewish condition in America have foretold at worst the demise, and at best the decline, of the Jewish community in this country in terms of religious strength, unity and political influence. I disagree.

The prophets of doom and gloom would have us believe that Toynbee was correct when he portrayed Jews as a vestigial remnant of a decadent society — powerless, purposeless and irrelevant to contemporary civilization. I do not accept this view even in terms of world Jewry and certainly do not concur with respect to American Jewry. Let's examine the present status of the latter and try to forecast its strengths and weaknesses in the years ahead.

Although, as of this writing, the 1980 census has not been fully tabulated, it is fair to assume that the Jewish population of the United States is not far different from that of the previous count. This would indicate that Jews will continue to constitute a declining percentage of the overall population. From an estimated 3.2% we are now well below 3%. The birthrate among American Jews remains below that of the general population and, in addition, the recent influx of immigrants to the United States includes relatively few Jews. But to extrapolate from these facts the demise of the strong, more-or-less-unified Jewish community, is to underestimate its staying power and its vitality and, above all, to ignore several thousand years of Jewish history. Whether viewed as a religious, cultural or ethnic minority, American Jews in the 1980s and beyond will remain an important factor in the political, social and commercial life of this country, contributing far more to the well-being of the nation than our numbers might indicate, rivalling the contributions of minority groupings many times our size.

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RICHARD MAASS is immediate past president of the American Jewish Committee and was the first chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

But what about the intermarriage problem, some may ask. It is variously estimated that one in four, or one in three, marriages of Jews today is to a non-Jew. Surely, it is argued, we cannot maintain our numbers in the face of this apostasy. I agree that if this rate of intermarriage were to continue and if attitudes toward such intermarried couples remain what they are today among synagogues and the rabbinate, then the Jewish community will sustain declining numbers in absolute, as opposed to relative, numbers. But this need not occur. Although intensified Jewish education and increased attendance at day schools may help forestall some of the drift toward marriage with Christians, we must face the reality that in a free society which is several generations removed from the *shtetl*, intermarriage will continue to occur regardless of internal pressures from the community and family. In today's environment, with few exceptions, newly-married couples of differing religions are treated as outcasts by both the rabbinate and the synagogue. Not only does the rabbi refuse to participate in such a wedding, but thereafter the couple is not welcome at most synagogues. The Jewish partner is forced into a position of no religion or the adoption of the religious beliefs of the spouse.

This is a self-defeating attitude, in my view, and one which will be subject to modification in the decade ahead. Surveys have shown that there is a willingness on the part of the non-Jewish partner to attend synagogue and to rear the children as Jews, provided there is acceptance from the synagogue itself. While not advocating, nor even accepting, the current rate of intermarriage, I earnestly suggest that we can reverse the pattern of alienation of intermarrieds from everything related to Judaism and provide future generations of committed Jews, by making our synagogues inclusive rather than exclusive.

I would be foolhardy to prophesy the nature of the purely religious community ten or twenty years ahead, particularly since even the most Orthodox among us disagree about the impact of an open, democratic society on religious beliefs. But there are certain noticeable trends which began in the late 1960s and have continued until to day. There has been a strengthening in the attraction of the more traditional religious groups for young Jews. Just as Reverend Moon's Unification Church, Jews for Jesus and similar missionary groups have found adherents among college-age Jews who are dissatisfied with society, politics, their families and their religion (or lack thereof), so have the Hasidic groups and the Havurot found theirs. It is apparent that many Jews and Christians alike are seeking religious foundations for their lives which transcend the "business as usual," easygoing style of their parents. The challenge to the varied segments of the Jewish religious establishment is to make religious affiliation and commitment meaningful in the lives of young people on a daily basis and not just on the Sabbath and religious holidays. There are encouraging signs of recognition of this need, and one example may be cited: a committee on Government and Public Affairs of Agudath Israel

recently completed a series of six conference on social concerns. Topics included the plight of the middle-class and the poor in our cities, unemployment, deteriorating neighborhoods, energy, and independence in foreign policy. That this major organization, representing Orthodox Jewry, should address itself to the temporal concerns of the city and the nation is more than an act of self-preservation. It is a contribution to America itself and a reaching out which cannot help attracting to its membership many whose interest in civic affairs has previously been channeled through only non-sectarian agencies. Each branch of Judaism has the opportunity — perhaps the responsibility — to do likewise and, in the process, obtain the commitment to Judaism of many who have drifted away because they saw no relationship between religious life and the problems of modern society.

Great concern has been expressed in the Jewish community in recent years over the growth of religious fundamentalism among Protestant groups in the United States. Certainly the Evangelical or “Born Again” Christian groups are the fastest-growing religious sects. They have been regarded with suspicion by most Jews, who see them as missionaries who would attempt to subvert, if not convert, our children. In fact, the dangers of their missionary zeal have been overrated while the danger of their political and social conservatism has been underestimated. This year, 1980, in the election just concluded, demonstrated the power that this recently united religious faction can wield. They have tested success in the political arena and we must expect them to increase their activity in support of right-wing politicians and of issues which blur the doctrine of church-state separation, as well as the negation of the social programs of the last twenty-five years which have tried to remove racial, religious and sex barriers to equal opportunity. If successful, this new political alignment would declare the United States a Christian nation, would introduce prayers into the schools, ban all abortions and in many ways attempt to return this land to a perceived simplicity and God-fearing righteousness of the 19th century. We, as Jews, have a major stake in frustrating their designs, for as a small, yet highly visible, minority we could easily become the target for their frustration as well as for their aggressive conduct.

But it is clear that we alone cannot counteract their progress. It is the duty of the Jewish community, through coalitions formed with other religious and ethnic groups, to publicize the dangers represented by this return to “old-fashioned conservatism” which is one step removed from a theocratic state and a new form of fascism. These new conservatives have burgeoned during a period when the alliances formed by Jews with other groups on behalf of Israel and civil rights are in disarray. Black-Jewish coalitions, after a quarter of a century of close cooperation, are not yet reestablished, following the disastrous events surrounding Ambassador Andrew Young’s resignation and the controversies over quotas and affirmative action which culminated in U.S. Supreme Court cases. And the

previous close collaboration of Jewish agencies with the liberal Protestant establishment has been strained to the breaking point by sharp differences over the Middle East, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Petroleum, of course, plays a role in this separation of partners. Alliances must be restored, for a final divorce would only isolate the Jewish community further.

At a recent meeting of a major national Jewish agency, a writer who is a capital "C" Conservative warned the Jewish community to beware of the "New Right," in these terms: "Do not think that because the New Right may support Israel in its contest with the Arabs and the PLO, that it is with you on any other issue. And even with respect to Israel, their support can evaporate." This is a dilemma of the 80s. We can't afford to go to bed with the only group that currently supports Israel!

If, as stated earlier, Jews will be a diminishing percentage of the total population in the 80s, will they continue to exert a disproportionate degree of influence in politics, commerce and the arts? Overall, I think the answer is yes. Let's look at the presidential election this year. All three candidates operated under the *presumption* (a friend says that presumption is the mother of a screw-up!) that the election would be quite close in the states in which there is a large Jewish electorate. So we witnessed the phenomenon of multiple, repeated appeals to 2.7% of the population. The Reagan landslide showed that all of the candidates could have ignored the Jewish vote with little change in the outcome. But this year may have been an aberration, and the Jewish vote in five or six states will still make a difference. Further, since a higher percentage of eligible Jews vote than do any other group, the vote is worth more than the numbers indicate, provided that there is a preponderance for one candidate or one party.

There will probably be a more even distribution of Jewish votes between the two major parties in the 80s. (The trend began this year with Reagan and Carter sharing equally 90%, and Anderson receiving the other 10%.) Assuming elections in which Israel is not the focal point for bullet voting, I still see an increasing share of the Jewish vote going to Republicans, in contrast to the normal 75-80% which the Democrats have obtained. This shift is in consonance with the trend to conservatism in the country and in recognition of the perceived failure of government-financed social programs to accomplish for the poor and disenfranchised what was intended. But when there is a distinctly Jewish issue at stake — Israel or internal U.S. — the Jewish vote will be as important as ever to the candidates.

The structures within the Jewish community will be the object of debate and contest during the next decade. In philanthropy, the tight grasp that the United Jewish Appeal/United Israel Appeal has on the available income from federated giving will be challenged by local community leaders who have responsibility for funding local and national

agency needs. As federal funding of local social programs diminishes and as inflation continues to affect all agencies, there will be a demand for the retention of larger percentages locally. To the extent that total giving does not rise commensurate with the total need, there will be an attempt to limit the funds directed to Israel. Obviously, this would occasion a sharp fight, whose outcome is problematical. In the community relations field there may also be a confrontation, as a consequence of the growing tendency of local federations to undertake, either directly or through their community relations councils, programming and planning on national or international issues which have previously been the province of the national agencies in this sphere. This development will be encouraged by the federations, which will find it increasingly difficult to involve competent and dedicated laymen in purely fundraising activities and will offer them the opportunity of programmatic work in the community or on a national level through representation. The national agencies will see this as a threat to their existence and will respond accordingly.

No crystal ball for the 80s would be complete without an examination of the prospect for anti-Semitism in the United States and the Jewish reaction to it. In retrospect, we survived the 70s remarkably well when we take into account the perils which we faced. The Yom Kippur War and the oil embargo which followed could have paved the way for wholesale, virulent anti-Semitism. They did not. That is a tribute to the intelligence and sense of fair play which are inherent in the American body politic, yet one which we tend to ignore when times are easy. The failure of Israel and Egypt to reach agreement on a Palestine entity, Jerusalem, the increased cost of imported oil, raids into Israel and counter raids into Lebanon, united and vicious attacks on Israel at the United Nations — all or any of these could have triggered domestic anti-Semitism. They did not. But having said so, it must be admitted that prejudice against Jews is on the increase in this country. Not yet in an alarming degree, but sufficiently noticeable to warrant attention and counteraction. Whereas it was not only unfashionable but also worthy of condemnation from one's peers to express anti-Semitic thoughts ten years ago, it seems possible today to do so almost with impunity. Whereas it once was possible to isolate the bigot from the press and from other media, today it is not, and through the electronic media the bigot is heard instantly and universally. The Jewish community in the 80s will "take on" the bigot with frontal (albeit verbal) counterattacks, something new in our defensive arsenal. The rash of vandalism of Jewish properties — cemeteries, synagogues and community buildings — which began in 1979 and has accelerated in 1980 is a manifestation of the malaise of society in general. Economic disruption, unemployment, lack of a national purpose and will provide the backdrop for this criminality: To some degree it is imitative behaviour: imitative of similar actions in France, Germany, England, and Italy, all of which were widely reported in the press. As the government of France has surely



learned by now, these expressions of anti-Semitism cannot be ignored or officially downplayed. They must be promptly dealt with — if necessary by Draconian measures — in order to prevent their spread. Any government which condones violence is destined to fall by violence. It is our duty to impress every locality in this country with the need to arrest and to prosecute every criminal who is guilty of vandalism, and not treat the acts as if they were youthful pranks.

Political development in the Middle East during the next decade will seriously affect the position of the American Jewish community vis-à-vis the general community. Assuming even that an understanding will be reached between Israel and Egypt on the thorny issues of West Bank autonomy and the status of Jerusalem and Gaza, there is at present faint hope that the other Arab states will accept any such agreements. Arab influence on American foreign policy will continue to be reflected in the U.S. Department of State, petrodollars will vie against principle in the conduct of foreign affairs, and the United States will remain isolated as the only supporter of Israel in the councils of nations. A grim picture, yes, but not a hopeless one. The Jewish community will have to develop new tools to convey to the American public the importance of Israel as a strategic asset, but this can be done only if our efforts are not undercut by untimely and unnecessary actions, beyond our control, taken by the Israeli government itself. I do not mean simply that Israel should have a better sense of public relations, but rather that every government official in that beleaguered land must understand that statements made, positions assumed and actions taken have a direct effect on American public opinion, and, by extension, on American foreign policy. To justify actions which have caused unnecessary tensions in Israeli-U.S. relations as having been done because of domestic Israeli politics is to threaten the vital support of this country, without which Israel cannot exist. It is this lack of understanding, which unsympathetic persons here attribute to arrogance, that can bring about divisions within the American Jewish community — not the policies which Israel adopts for its own security and well-being.

In conclusion, a few observations on the nature of American Jewish leadership in the 80s: Since World War II we have witnessed sharp changes in the concept of leadership and in the manner in which leaders function. There is no longer a small cadre of people who speak for the “Jewish Community” or to whom American Jews are willing to entrust the authority for spokespersonship. We have never had an American equivalent of the British Board of Deputies. Our response to the perceived need for unified action or for public statements has been to create “umbrella” organizations such as the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Synagogue Council of America. These bodies operate through the

mechanism of consensus and generally leave room for dissent among the organizational members. Attempts will undoubtedly be made during the next decade to establish "one voice" for American Jewry, but the effort will, and should, fail. The American Jewish community is as diverse and as independent as the pluralistic society in which we live and a return to the European-style *kehillah* would sacrifice the vitality and intellectual ferment which has characterized our growth and our strength. The importance and stature of earlier American Jewish leaders such as Louis Marshall, Stephen Wise or Joseph Proskauer, were attributable not only to their immense talents and influence, but also to the absence of structures within the Jewish community which were competent and willing to assume roles of leadership. By democratizing Jewish life we have diverted the beam of public attention from individuals and focused it on organizations. It is my belief that in this process we have lost nothing — rather, we have gained strength and maturity. This trend will continue for the benefit of all Jewry and will make possible new generations of leaders, coming from within the ranks of our complex organizational structure. So be it!

# *Optimism Is Realism*

THEODORE R. MANN

THERE IS ALL AROUND US A SENSE OF DESPAIR about the Jewish condition. In part, it arises out of a perception of increased anti-Semitism here and abroad, and of increasing pressures put upon Israel by friendly and formerly friendly nations since 1973 — which many Jews equate with anti-Semitism.

I don't share that despair, but I have learned that one is an optimist regarding the Jewish condition only at the risk of losing one's credibility. It is somehow emotionally more satisfying to a Jewish audience to play upon the strings of despair.

Consider the situation here in America. Consider some of the events within our own memories which would have produced severe anti-Semitism in many other societies: A catastrophic depression in the 30s; a World War in the 40s; an anti-Communist witch hunt in the 50s; a frontal challenge by Jews of Protestant practices in the public schools in the 50s and 60s; a racial revolution, resented by millions of white Americans and, to some degree, fueled by Jewish human rights activists in the 50s and 60s; a frontal challenge by Jews of aid for Catholic schools in the 60s and 70s; an enormous scandal in the 70s in which a president, with some known anti-Semitic feelings, was cornered by overwhelming forces until he resigned; a series of gasoline shortages in the 70s following, and related to, the Yom Kippur War; the emergence of American Jews as a highly affluent ethnic group after World War II; evangelical fervor to return to a "Christian America," symbolized by the terms "Key '73" and "Moral Majority." In many another place, any one of these events would have been more than enough to produce a serious outbreak of anti-Semitism. Not here. Quite the contrary: A review of the annual assessments of anti-Semitism made by the major national and local Jewish organizations over the past 30 years establishes that, while there is an ebb and flow to such feelings, the trend in those years has been unmistakably downward. Moreover, measured by the acceptance of Jews in various institutions — medical schools, university faculties, major law and accounting firms, etc. — discrimination against Jews is at an all-time low. Finally, there has not been one act of political anti-Semitism — governmental action intended to turn the popular anger away from itself by blaming the Jews, as happened in Poland in 1968, and previously in our history as a people on innumerable occasions — in 200 years of American history. Alarmist reports not-

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THEODORE R. MANN is immediate past chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations as well as of the NJCRAC.

withstanding, the perception of a worsening shift in the American public's attitude toward American Jews simply has no basis in reality.

Consider, next, Israel. Israel's problems are of heroic proportions: Its enemies in the Arab world control the substance which Israel's natural allies, in Western Europe and Africa, believe they absolutely must have in order to survive. It is ultimately pointless, and factually wrong, to argue that oil-dependent nations who regularly condemn Israel in the United Nations are acting on an anti-Semitic impulse. True, the price which such nations are prepared to let Israel pay in order to secure their oil supplies is staggering. But posit a non-Jewish nation of only three and a half million souls standing in the way of a secure supply of oil to oil-starved Western nations. Does anyone really believe that such a hypothetical non-Jewish nation would be faring better today than Israel? Yes, Israel's problems are of heroic proportions, but her political isolation in the 1980s is not another manifestation of Jew-hatred.

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All right, so anti-Semitism does *not* threaten Jewish survival. But here in America aren't we equally threatened by the *lack* it? by the fact that America is so good that we will disappear by assimilation? We are apparently a people that cannot stand prosperity, preferring a heads-you-win-tails-we-lose assessment of the Jewish condition. Is there a real basis for the concern over our ability to endure, as a people, in the modern world? When it comes to that issue, too many of us have made a leap into despair when all of the evidence — and I refer to 4,000 years of evidence under every conceivable social variant — justifies, instead, a leap of faith.

I am a betting man. I say that anyone betting against Jewish survival is a damned fool, whose judgment is seriously flawed, whose wisdom is totally misinformed by any appropriate conclusions which emerge from our 4,000 year history. That history attests to nothing more than it does to our infinite regenerative capacity.

Yet it must be said that part of the reason we have endured, and endured creatively, is our consciousness in every generation of our obligation to survive as a people. And so, giving careful attention to survival problems — even in the United States of America — is not only proper but is required of us.

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It would seem to be part of the human condition that a nation will not forever permit to live in peace within it a sub-group bent on its own distinctive survival. That was the lesson of Goshen, three and a half millenia ago. The theme has recurred countless times. The first question is whether, over the long haul, the United States will be different.

The fact that our State Papers guarantee individual liberty, and that that liberty has essentially been preserved over several centuries, is little comfort in dealing with this question. We must reckon with the changing

moods and attitudes of masses of human beings, with all the defects in the human condition which the passage of even great periods of time will not cure. There simply are times when people do not like, and will not tolerate, other people among them whom they regard as strangers or as "different." And when such feelings become strong enough, constitutional guarantees are of only limited value.

But there is a second line of defense, not grounded in the State Papers. Ours is a nation increasingly dedicated to the concept of pluralism. A nation which, in addition to its tradition of individual freedom, also welcomes and encourages a variety of separate cultural streams, is, indeed, different from any nation which preceded it. Where many groups cherish their ethnic identity, Jews will be more secure in openly cherishing theirs. That is why pluralism is a principle that is critically important to us. And the past several decades have seen a flowering of that principle — as the concept itself has gained adherents, as a new immigration policy has caused an influx of a variety of ethnic and racial groups, as blacks have become so obviously conscious of their roots and, indeed, as Jews have become far more aggressive in asserting the principle. When I hear Jews complaining about the assertion of *group* rights by blacks I instinctively agree, based on my understanding of the Constitution, but I counsel compromise because there is a brighter side to the developing concepts of ethnicity. For example, we were not the intended beneficiaries of the enormous growth in ethnic studies programs. But we have benefited greatly from it, for it has advanced cultural pluralism and, incidentally, has made possible Jewish studies programs in universities, thereby impacting on countless thousands of young Jews. When I have undertaken to challenge the constitutionality of a law giving financial aid to parochial education, I have done so only after an agonizing balancing of self-interest, for the other side of the coin is that a strong Catholic educational system preserves and enhances religious (and ethnic) pluralism as few other institutions do.

Is the concept of pluralism a permanent part of America? Clearly it has been in the ascendance in the past generation and will shield us for the foreseeable future. But Jews like to think about the *unforeseeable* future. It is, of course, theoretically possible that, with the passage of time, ethnic and racial differences, and religious differences among Christians, will essentially disappear, with only American Jews still insisting on maintaining their own identity. It seems to me that such a projection is extremely speculative and far fetched, even for the distant future. Religious pluralism is a permanent part of America. True, that is not good enough: American Jewry in its present manifestation could not long endure as a religion only. But the variety of racial and ethnic groups entering the United States right now promises a cultural diversity in the distant future that none of us thought possible a generation ago.

There is, however, a second question. Since we are talking "over the long haul," will American Jews want to maintain their group identity,

group differences, on which their survival as Jews depends? It seems to me that we will. We will not be overwhelmed by the magnetism of main stream American culture.

I sometimes wonder at the magnitude of the culture shock that Jews must have encountered when first they came into contact with Periclean Athens. They could not perceive the dark underside of Greek and Roman culture, as we view it from a distance of thousands of years, and vast numbers of our people were lost to its blandishments. Or the culture shock that Jews must have sustained, coming from their controlled *shtetl* environment into a world in which Shakespeare and Leonardo and Bach and Mozart were already history and Shelley, Keats and Beethoven were coming into their primes. Our ancestors were decimated by a rapid assimilation into a culture that must have bowled them over.

But the situation in the United States is in no way comparable; culture shock is not a problem for us. I am upset, for example, when I consider the quality of the Encyclopedia Judaica as compared to the Encyclopedia Britannica. But, then, I realize to what a great extent the scholarship of Jews enhanced the Britannica, too. It is not culture shock that I endure at all. It is simply anger that more Jews of distinction do not devote themselves to specifically Jewish undertakings. I feel the same way when I consider the successes of social activism through organizations like Common Cause and ACLU, as compared to Jewish organizations that are committed to the same social activism; or when I consider the lower level of excellence of modern Jewish music as compared to the quality of the best music that is available in the American milieu. The illustrations could be multiplied, but with each illustration I will anger more and more readers who disagree with my assessments of quality. The point is that, in each case, we are protected from culture shock by the knowledge that *Jewish* activism, *Jewish* musicianship informs both sides of the equation. And while we must urgently work to change the fact that so little of the available Jewish talent is committed to specifically *Jewish* undertakings, this fact does not create feelings of inferiority in our people. Quite the contrary, the prominence of Jewish talent in the emerging American culture is often a point of pride, and that pride is, itself, an important contributor to the desire of Jews to remain Jews in the American society. In an American Jewish community which increasingly views itself not as a religious community but as a people with distinctive cultural, religious and attitudinal attributes, *all* of the manifold activities of our people impact on the self-image of each of us.

My own experience in scores of Jewish communities all over America tells me that our people's self-image is healthy and improving and, in the main, American Jews have gone about as far as they care, or will care, to go on the road to assimilation. Wherever I travel, I see and am aware of developing feelings of identity, community and pride racing the clock against the eroding effects of intermarriage, and winning. These Jewish communities are so similar to one another that, except for local accents,



even a perceptive visitor would be hard put to know whether he was conversing with Jews in Oregon, Houston, Minneapolis or Delaware. Given the historically unique fact that ours is a Jewish community with utterly no centralized authority either nationally or locally, no institution in which, or person in whom, attributes of compulsion or power over others reside, the degree of community feeling, of peoplehood, among American Jews is quite remarkable.

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This question of optimism versus pessimism in assessing the Jewish condition is, in itself, a critically important issue of substance to Jews.

Our history attests to the dangers we bring on ourselves by overly pessimistic *or* overly optimistic projections. For a tiny people carefully treading its way through history, realism is especially essential. One is reminded of the zealotry with which Armenians welcomed the invading Russians in 1915, only to regret such candor when the Turks regained their territory and instituted a holocaust of very considerable proportions. There are, of course, many other examples of dangerously excessive optimism from our own history: The optimism of those of our own relatives who were given a choice, and chose to remain in Europe in the 1930s is perhaps the most gruesome. It is neither the most recent example — Iranian Jews choosing to remain in Iran in 1980 is the most recent — nor the most ancient. The decision to remain in Goshen, before a new King arose over Egypt, was surely the original wrong decision based on overly optimistic projections. There have been countless others in between.

But examples of the dangers of overly pessimistic projections of the Jewish condition also come to mind. The decision to confront, rather than outlast, the Roman Empire in the sixth decade of the Christian era is surely the most traumatic example. Our diaspora history really begins out of that decision, caused by feelings of despair, isolation and loneliness that bred zealotry. That lesson has direct application to the current situation in the middle-east. Earlier, I noted that the political leverage of the Arab nations' oil monopoly is Israel's greatest current problem, and that it is not anti-Semitism which accounts for the regrettable behavior of some oil-dependent nations. What is most important is that the problem is one of limited duration. Ten, fifteen years more of Western and African dependence on Arab oil may seem like infinity to the faint-hearted. But to Jews it should be regarded as a difficult, but short-term and, therefore, manageable problem. Israel's current adversaries have potentially even greater power than did the Roman Empire, but that power is far more transient. It is a time to outlast them, not to confront them. Sometimes the greatest danger to our survival comes not from external forces, but from our own overly pessimistic assessment of them.

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I ask myself, why now? Why weren't we overcome by despair, say, in 1970? Then we were confronting three seemingly intractable problems, each threatening our survival as a people. In the Soviet Union, 3,000,000 of our people were on the verge of disappearing after a half century of separation from their roots. In the middle-east, another 3,000,000 of our people were surrounded by 100,000,000 Arabs bent on their extinction. In the United States, almost 6,000,000 of our people were struggling, many thought unsuccessfully, with a different kind of survival problem — how to endure, Jewishly, in a free society. In the intervening ten years we have witnessed events which were then unimaginable. Miraculously, a quarter of a million Jews have left the Soviet Union; Israel's most populous and strongest adversary has made peace with her; and American Jewry has begun to develop a real sense of its own communal identity. If 4,000 years of Jewish history have not instilled in us an awesome respect for our survival capacity, surely the events of the last decade should have done so.

# *Moses Mendelssohn: Some Reflections on his Thought*

EVA JOSPE

IN THE FALL OF 1979, THE FOLLOWING tersely worded notice appeared in an American Jewish newspaper:

West Berlin: Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn was honored on his 250th birthday. Representatives of West Berlin's government and cultural scene heard Professor Alexander Altmann of Brandeis University speak on "Enlightenment and Culture." — "The Moses Mendelssohn Prize," of about \$12,000, was also established. It will be awarded annually to promote tolerance.

Readers unfamiliar with Mendelssohn's name may have wondered what motivated Berlin's government and members of its "cultural scene" to commemorate the birthday of an eighteenth century Jewish philosopher. But anyone acquainted with Mendelssohn's life and thought will feel that a kind of poetic justice was done by this celebration and by the creation of this prize. For it was in Germany's classical age of reason that Moses Mendelssohn, the preeminent propounder of the philosophy of Enlightenment in that country, came to be the symbol of, if not identified with, that era's concept of tolerance. And it was in Germany's darkest age of unreason that Mendelssohn's physical and spiritual descendants were methodically destroyed by a demonic intolerance run amuck.

With those two eras now gone, and with our trust in the ideals of the earlier period rather shaken by the events of the later one, a re-examination of the dual legacy that Mendelssohn left behind — his concept of Judaism as well as his general philosophy — may be useful in assessing his significance for contemporary Jewish thought.

It seems quite fitting, though also amazing — given the socio-historical setting in which he lived (1729–1786) — that Mendelssohn was referred to as "the Jewish Socrates" by many highborn and highminded gentiles of his day, for both Judaism and philosophy were of vital importance to him; more than that, they were essential, constitutive elements of his life and thought. The ghetto-born son of Mendel Menachem, a Torah-scribe of Dessau, considered Judaism the very matrix of his being, nurturing and sustaining him on all levels of his existence. Yet, under the mentorship of Berlin's new class of secularly educated young Jews and their liberal gentile friends, he also developed "a taste for the arts and

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EVA JOSPE is professional lecturer in modern Jewish thought at Georgetown University and at George Washington University.

sciences”<sup>1</sup> and became addicted to the “bliss of philosophizing,” an addiction of which he refused to be cured. “No frigid reasonableness,” he was to write just a few days before his death to a friend concerned about his health, could possibly keep him from his philosophical pursuits which “added to my life a dimension of happiness it would otherwise have lacked.”<sup>2</sup>

His “bliss of philosophizing” was enhanced by Mendelssohn’s early encounter and subsequent friendship with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The two young men, born in the same year, were deeply congenial despite their completely different backgrounds. Lessing, the son of a Protestant minister and the product of a first-rate classical education, and Mendelssohn, the orthodox *sofer*’s son whose secular education had been informal and was of very recent vintage, were much alike in personality and outlook. Both were gifted writers with a high standard of excellence, who early in their careers made a name for themselves by their contributions to literary journals. Above all, they shared the same *Weltanschauung*. They were fervent believers in the autonomy of reason, in human rights, and in religious tolerance — ideals of the German enlightenment which they personified in their own lives and disseminated through their writings.

There were, however, also issues on which they differed radically, for instance their view on man’s reputed progress throughout history. Lessing believed, and said so in his essay, “The Education of the Human Race,” that history shows mankind’s linear ascent to increasingly higher levels of intellectual and spiritual understanding. Mendelssohn — who, by his own admission, lacked any interest in, or sense of, history — disagreed. It is not mankind in the aggregate, he argues, it is each human being that advances from a lower to a higher stage of physical, mental and spiritual maturity:

Nature does not intend the perfection of mankind; its goal is the perfection of man, of the individual. Every single human being is meant to develop his talents and abilities, hence become increasingly perfect . . . If mankind were to progress continuously, new arrivals on earth would find no opportunity to make use of their own faculties, to develop their highest potential . . . It is obvious that mankind must here or there regress if the individual is to make progress . . .<sup>3</sup>

His notion of progress as every individual’s set task and goal and his conviction of every person’s self-worth actually led Mendelssohn to de-emphasize one of Judaism’s basic tenets: belief in, or hope for, the coming of the Messiah.<sup>4</sup>

1. Eva Jospe, ed. and tr., *Moses Mendelssohn, Selections from his Writings*, Introduction by Alfred Jospe, (New York, 1975), p.52.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 168,169.

4. Much to the chagrin of Hermann Cohen (otherwise a great admirer of Mendelssohn’s) who, in keeping with his own future-oriented philosophy of Judaism, feels “that the religio-

I cannot quite agree [he responds to a Protestant minister's statement] with what you say about the Messiah I am supposed to expect. [His coming would] in mankind's present condition . . . mean mankind's undoing. It would . . . be the end of both man's freedom and all his noble endeavors to develop and cultivate his innate gifts and thus come closer to salvation . . .<sup>5</sup>

Lessing, as a believing Christian, had an obviously entirely different concept of the Messiah. But the two friends were, nevertheless, able to discuss even so fundamental a divergence of opinion without self-righteousness, and in a spirit of mutual respect.

It is this spirit of mutual respect and far-reaching tolerance which Lessing celebrates in his best-known play, *Nathan der Weise* (Nathan the Wise). The work was regarded as the author's public tribute to his friend, since all who knew Mendelssohn easily detected a close resemblance between his personality and that of the "dramatic poem's" central character, the Jew Nathan who, embodying sagacity, kindness and human understanding, is asked to serve as arbiter in an inheritance dispute.

Lessing uses the play and its famous parable of the three rings to declare that none of the three monotheistic religions can — in the absence of any evidence to the contrary — claim to be the one and only, the "true" faith. They are all equally true; for according to our still limited understanding, the truth of a religion lies solely in its ability to instill in its adherents true values, such as awareness of, and humble submission to, the will of God. And God wills that men act toward each other with benevolence and brotherly love.

This belief was fully shared by Mendelssohn, as evidenced by a letter that he wrote to the Hereditary Prince of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel:

Inasmuch as *all* men must have been destined by their Creator to attain salvation, no particular religion can be exactly true. I dare assert that this principle is the fundamental criterion of truth in all religious matters.<sup>6</sup>

Today's reader, however, may well ask whether conflicts devolving from basically irreconcilable doctrines or principles can really be solved by attitudes or even acts of benevolence and brotherly love. To be sure, Nathan does work out an acceptable compromise to facilitate the contentious brothers' peaceful co-existence — no small achievement in itself. Still, such a pragmatic approach to a problem of principle leaves room for doubt, inasmuch as a question of truth has been shifted to a plea for tolerance to avoid a potentially divisive decision. But is such a shift legitimate? Has the "solution" of the problem not actually created another, intrinsically graver one by implying the relativity of religious values, or even of the very concept "truth"?

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ethical horizon of the Jews was somewhat obstructed during this period [the second half of the 19th century]. (Eva Jospe, ed. and tr., *Reason and Hope*, Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen, Introduction by Eva Jospe [New York, 1971], p. 182.)

5. E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 127.

6. Alfred Jospe, tr., *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings by Moses Mendelssohn* (New York, 1969), p. 124.

Apparently not troubled by such doubts, Mendelssohn did not question the premise on which Nathan bases his advocacy of tolerance. And yet he was as profoundly convinced of Judaism's "truth" ("... a faith our hearts consider true . . .")<sup>7</sup> as Lessing was of the "truth" of Christianity — an ideological inconsistency neither thinker seems to have been aware of. Nor did their commitment to different "truths" change the character of their relationship. They unreservedly admired each other as authors and as men, with Mendelssohn depending heavily on Lessing's professional judgment. Feeling mournfully depleted after the latter's untimely death, Mendelssohn wrote to the brother of his late friend:

With a grateful heart I thank Providence for the blessing she bestowed upon me by introducing me so early in my youth to a man who has molded my very soul. I used to think of him as both my friend and judge before embarking upon any course of action, or before writing a single line; and I shall continue to think of him as my friend and judge whenever I shall undertake anything of import . . . The generosity with which he shared his insights would on occasion almost keep me from recognizing their great value . . . once in a while, he would intermingle his ideas and mine so imperceptibly that I myself could no longer tell them apart . . .<sup>8</sup>

These intimate thought-exchanges had often taken place during their mutually savored and enriching meetings. But due to the exigencies of their respective work, the friends' contact had frequently to be maintained by letter. This held true not only in Lessing's case. Over the years, as Mendelssohn's fame spread, he conducted a voluminous correspondence with an ever greater number of men and women,<sup>9</sup> some of whom lived in places that were, by decree of the authorities, inaccessible to a Jew — an ironic circumstance that did not escape their "circumcised friend."<sup>10</sup> The give and take of this correspondence and its occasionally soul-searching discussions about life's ultimate questions served often as a sounding-board for Mendelssohn's ideas and contributed in no small measure to the emergence of his philosophical views and even of his Jewish thought.

Living harmoniously in two cultures and cherishing the values of both, Mendelssohn bent every effort to free "the wings" of his people's spirit, paralyzed by the "deadweight" of suppression-bred fears and stunted by ignorance and superstition, so that they, too, would eventually be able to live truly human lives. Toward this end, and hoping to smooth their obstacle-strewn path into modernity, he decided to provide them

7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

8. E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 67.

9. Mendelssohn's attitude toward women appears to have been amusingly ambivalent. He obviously took them seriously as conversational partners (both epistolary and in person). But he became slightly uncomfortable when he learned that his fiancée had begun to read serious books. "What do you want to do?" he asks, only half-jestingly scolding her for her "almost misdirected zeal" to acquire an education. "Become a scholar? God forbid! To be moderately well read is becoming to a female; scholarship is not" (*Ibid.*, p. 58).

10. *Ibid.*, p. 138.



with some basic equipment that would facilitate their civil, social and cultural advance.

Indispensable for this advance was a mastery of German, as “Moses Dessau” well knew. Without ever denying the world of his origin, he had come to deride its language as an uncouth jargon that was as offensive to his aesthetic sensibilities as it was detrimental to its speakers’ civilized conduct. To induce them to exchange their linguistic *mishmash* for a more refined idiom, but at the same time to ensure that this exchange would not weaken their Jewish loyalties, they had to be educated, he felt, in a special manner for which a special textbook was needed. Its language was to make them — particularly the young generation, including his own children — literate in the modern sense of the term; its content was to imbue them with the central precepts of their religious tradition and sensitize them to its meaningfulness and beauty. With this educational goal in mind, Mendelssohn set out to translate the Book of Psalms (whose profound piety and aesthetic appeal “made many a bitter hour sweeter” for him)<sup>11</sup> as well as the Pentateuch from Hebrew into German.

The Torah translation seemed an act of near-heresy to the most tradition-bound, and an achievement of nearly redemptive proportions to the *Haskalah*-oriented, “enlightened” segment of Germany’s Jews. Some of the strict traditionalists, outraged by this profanation of a sacred text, and convinced that to read the Torah in German<sup>12</sup> was the first step toward perdition, threatened to ban the work. But a number of prominent rabbis throughout Germany and beyond appreciated its intent and execution, and saw in the Bible’s new accessibility the promise of a more informed Jew and a better-understood Judaism. Their expectations and those of Mendelssohn himself seemed to come true. During the last years of his life (and well into the nineteenth century) his translation, accompanied by his Hebrew commentary, the *Bi’ur*, succeeded in re-introducing the Jew, whose mind had for centuries been preoccupied almost exclusively with Talmudic studies, to the Bible, and thus making him aware that the best of his religious tradition was fully congruent with the ideals and aspirations of the surrounding culture.

Though the Jewish propounder of enlightened thinking saw no contradiction between his religious beliefs and his philosophical convictions, some Christians, theologians as well as laymen, did. They thought it paradoxical that a man of his intellectual stature, a man, moreover, who on several occasions had shown an almost sympathetic attitude toward Christianity, should persist in clinging to as anachronistic, as narrowly particularistic a religion as they considered Judaism to be. Would not conversion to the all-embracing, universalistic faith of the Christian be the only logical step to take for the famed, the wise philosopher?

11. Ibid, p. 72.

12. To lessen the shock, the translation’s first edition was transliterated into Hebrew characters.

There were several such inquiries and/or challenges; some were more, some less subtle, and some possibly even motivated by the genuine desire to make Mendelssohn “see the light” of Christianity which, after all, represented a higher stage than Judaism in mankind’s religious development. But other communications were tinged with hostility and the obvious desire to embarrass “the Jew of Berlin” or, better still, to convert him so as to get rid of the ecclesiastical scandal of his errancy.

The man seemingly most irked by this scandal was Johann Caspar Lavater, a Protestant minister of Zürich who, much impressed with Mendelssohn’s keen mind and tolerant views, had for some years maintained an, as it were, professional contact with the Jewish thinker. Thus, he probably felt justified in approaching him on a personal matter (which, however, due to the manner in which it was pursued, became a highly publicized affair). Convinced of the cogency with which a French philosopher, Charles Bonnet, had demonstrated “the historical truth” of Christianity in a treatise called *La Palingénésie philosophique* (Philosophical Palingenesis), Lavater translated some of its pertinent passages into German and dedicated his translation to Mendelssohn. Praising in print the “Israelite in whom there is no guile” for his “steadfast love of truth” and “incorruptible impartiality,” the clergyman asked him either to refute Bonnet’s arguments publicly if he were to judge them erroneous, or, if he found them irrefutable, equally publicly to do “what Socrates would have done,”<sup>13</sup> which, of course, would be tantamount to a public confession of Christianity’s “truth.”

The gauntlet had been dropped, and there was nothing to be done but pick it up, much as Mendelssohn hated to do so. His reply to Lavater clearly shows the agonizing effort that it had cost him. He not only found this kind of publicity obnoxious — he was also painfully aware of his precarious situation as a Jew who, no matter how renowned, had to tread carefully in an open debate with a Christian theologian. To add to his discomfort, he had also to consider the feelings of certain elements within the Jewish community which regarded any religious disputation with the age-old, feared adversary as a foolhardy and dangerous undertaking.<sup>14</sup>

It may have been for these reasons that Mendelssohn’s reply to Lavater falls short of coming to grips with the crucial question concerning the comparative merit, intrinsic worth or “truth” of Judaism and Christianity. He rejects with great dignity the attempt to convert him, and speaks in no uncertain terms of his unshakable loyalty to the faith of his fathers, the result of long years of source-study. But he fails to demonstrate the theological validity of Judaism, its own claim to truth, its “intel-

13. Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn, A Biographical Study* (University of Ala: U. of Ala. Press, 1973), p. 109.

14. In a private letter, Mendelssohn says about the Lavater affair: “God knows I did not like to disengage myself from this dispute. It was a matter of submitting my will to that of others. If I had had my own way, my reply would have been wholly different” (E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 140).

lectual respectability" (to use a modern term). Instead, he follows three lines of argument which do not really meet Lavater's challenge:

1) The Torah was given to the Jew alone, hence is binding only upon him. Thus, with merely his own but no one else's salvation depending on the observance of the Mosaic Law, the Jew feels no missionary zeal nor any need for religious disputation.

2) No religious belief, even if considered erroneous by those who do not share it, should be made the subject of a public (and potentially destructive) controversy, for even an erroneous belief may do some incidental good by serving to uphold *society's moral values*.

3) It seems only right that Jews, "content to be tolerated and protected," and owing "much grateful appreciation to any government" that does not interfere with their religious practices, abstain "from religious disputes with the dominant creed."<sup>15</sup>

However, Mendelssohn could also become more explicit. Arguing against the sham-conversions that were frequently offered to the Jew when attempts at a true conversion had failed, he wrote in his "Counter-reflections" (to Bonnet's Palingenesis and Lavater's Dedication):

What, then, is it that keeps us from muttering a false confession which would make us and our descendants *indistinguishable* from those who now scoff at us? Nothing but our love for the religion of our fathers, a faith our hearts consider true and our lips will not deny. Were it not for that faith of ours, we could easily . . . overcome all our misery . . . One does not even ask us genuinely to accept a doctrine we cannot believe. All we are being asked is to mouth some words, and forget our conscience . . . But our love for our fathers' religion is stronger than any misery we may have to suffer, is stronger even than death.<sup>16</sup>

It was not only love for his ancestral faith that motivated these words, but also a keenly felt need for freedom of conscience. Thus, he wrote:

Religious matters should be left to the conscience of the individual. We should not judge whatever it is that gives another a sense of inner security and peace. If we genuinely love our fellow man, we must not argue with him where his heart speaks louder than his mind.<sup>17</sup>

The same principle that made conversion, even a merely "muttered" one, unacceptable to Mendelssohn, made him reject a (presumably well-meant) proposal<sup>18</sup> to grant to Jewish communities a certain degree of autonomy which would include the right to impose a ban upon their members. Feeling that it was dangerous to let any religious group, whether church or synagogue, have the power of jurisdiction which should be the exclusive prerogative of the state, Mendelssohn undertook

15. A. Jospe, *Op. cit.*, p. 120

16. E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 145.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

18. Made by a young Councillor in Berlin's department for foreign affairs, Ch. W. Dohm, in memorandum, a "On the Civil Improvement of the Jews," to be submitted to the Alsatian authorities who threatened the Jews with expulsion.

to define the tasks, and delimit the respective spheres of influence, of State and Church, and at the same time to develop “a philosophical theory of Judaism” (Ernst Cassirer). The vehicle he chose for both, a work called *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power in Judaism*<sup>19</sup>, was published three years before his death.

Freedom of thought, Mendelssohn maintains in *Jerusalem*, can be ensured only by a complete separation of State and Church. True, both institutions are indispensable pillars of society. True, too, both share a common goal: the promotion of man’s welfare. Nevertheless, their ways of achieving this goal are utterly different. The State has the task to see to the smooth functioning of society; to secure the individual’s rights; to spell out the citizen’s obligations, and make sure they are fulfilled. In short, the Church has the task — a task it shares with all religions — to implant in man a moral conviction. To do so, the Church must transmit to him those values which, integrated into his personality, will lead to the conduct expected of him. Neither Church nor State may ever attempt to control man’s thoughts. However, the State does have the power to coerce (that is, to enforce its legitimate rules), while the Church ought to use its power only to persuade. Religious conviction is gained by insight, not imposed by injunction.

In addition to describing the respective domains of Church and State, *Jerusalem* examines questions of Judaism’s religious legislation and of so central a religious issue as revelation; and it proceeds to prove that Judaism’s “eternal truths” are entirely compatible with the rational principles of an enlightened philosophy.

All of this represents Mendelssohn’s reply to a pamphlet, *The Search for Light and Right*, by a Christian, August Friedrich Cranz (described as “more a scribbler than a serious author”)<sup>20</sup> with a Postscript by a Berlin army chaplain, David Moerschl. Both Cranz and Moerschl had raised questions — obviously not in good faith — about the “theological truth,” that is, the religious validity, of Judaism.

In contradistinction to his rather circuitous reply to Lavater, *Jerusalem* clearly defines Mendelssohn’s position on basic questions about Judaism. The work stresses, above all, that any religious truth must be grounded in reason. If so, all men of sound mind will be able to grasp it,

19. One hundred and thirteen years earlier, Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Tractate* had dealt with the relationship of State and Church. But, as Julius Guttman points out, “The exposition of Judaism in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is meant to deprive it of its religious significance, whereas *Jerusalem* is conceived as an apologia for Judaism. The relationship between religion and state, too, is defined differently in both thinkers, notwithstanding the similarity of their points of departure (Alfred Jospe, tr., “Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* and Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*,” *Achtundvierzigster Bericht der Hochschule Für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* [Berlin, 1931]).

20. Altmann, *Op.cil.*, p. 437. On the strength of “a statement [by Cranz himself] that has come to light only recently,” Prof. Altmann, using evidence provided by Prof. J. Katz, disproves the long-held assumption that the pamphlet’s author was Joseph von Sonnenfels, an Austrian convert to Christianity (Ibid., p. 511).

unaided by super-natural means. Their God-given reasoning power is all that they need to arrive at rational insights or to discover religious truths. Deviating from earlier Jewish thinkers — especially from Maimonides to whom he is often compared because both men were rationalists, and both sought to bring Judaism into accord with secular philosophy — Mendelssohn does not accept the theory that truth can be derived from two sources, reason and revelation. Nor does he agree with the Church's dogma which insists that man can be saved (in the sense of being granted eternal bliss) only by an act of faith. Is it conceivable, he asks, that a just God would restrict life in the realm of the forever blessed only to those of His creatures who profess a faith grounded in and substantiated by revelation? If we believe, as we surely must, that all men (including the denizens of the Far Indies or Greenland!) are God's children, we must also believe that they can all know their Father and His divine truth by virtue of their natural reason, and without help of missionaries.<sup>21</sup>

Granted, the Bible recounts many super-natural events, or miracles. However, a miracle cannot establish a truth. Truth, Mendelssohn holds, is either self-evident, or it is no truth. No miracle can prove something that contradicts reason, or something that could not be proven just as well by natural (that is, rational) means. The function of a miracle is merely to support certain truths that man has already discovered by dint of his innate mental faculties.

Applied to the miraculous circumstances attending the Giving of the Torah — and Mendelssohn fully accepts the factuality of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai — his theory represents, however, a difficulty: did this miraculous event really merely *support* human insights? Did it not, rather, *convey* those insights to all who witnessed it? In Mendelssohn's interpretation, the Sinaitic Law represents both a revealed and a reasoned-out truth, with the latter anteceding the former. Had the people not been intellectually and morally prepared for the content of revelation even before they approached the mountain, they might not have accepted the truths that they were to receive there. But since these truths "had probably been taught and explained" to them already, they were by then "proved by human reason," hence "certain beyond all doubt."<sup>22</sup>

Judaism, Mendelssohn explicates, certainly does teach divine truths — but does not make them into articles of faith. As for Maimonides' Thirteen Articles of Faith, he has this to say: "Thank God they have not been forged into shackles for our beliefs."<sup>23</sup> And asserting that Judaism has no dogma that a Jew must believe in order to attain eternal salvation, he writes:

Among the precepts and ordinances of the Mosaic Law, there is none saying "You shall believe" or "You shall not believe." All say "You shall do," or You

21. Letter to Lavater, (A. Jospe, *Op.cit.*, p. 117).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

shall not do." You are not commanded to believe, for faith accepts no commandments; it accepts only what comes to it by reasoned conviction.<sup>24</sup>

And, for Mendelssohn, it is, indeed, a matter of reasoned conviction to regard Judaism's teachings — preeminent among them the existence and providence of God — as eternal verities. Being axiomatic and entirely rational, they neither need to be revealed nor accepted on faith. These truths, furthermore, seem to him not even specifically Jewish. They do, of course, comprise Judaism's basic tenets; but they also represent insights and beliefs shared universally by all adherents of other "natural" religions.

What, then, is uniquely Jewish about the Sinaitic revelation? It is the *Law* that was given there to Moses, or that body of laws whose observance distinguishes the Jew, "who can attain salvation in no other way,"<sup>25</sup> from the non-Jew. Mendelssohn declares that *Judaism* (in contradistinction to Christianity) is *no revealed religion. It is revealed legislation*. And, as such, it demands religious observance rather than the profession of a religious credo.<sup>26</sup> It asks for orthodox practice rather than orthodox belief. Orthodox practice, however, can neither be disposed of nor altered at will. The law on which it is based was issued by God, hence must remain binding forever in its totality, unless He Himself were to revoke it.

Similarly, Mendelssohn is convinced that Jews "must not take even a single step preparatory to a return to Palestine,"<sup>27</sup> unless God were to lead them there. And though he frequently speaks of "the Jewish nation" or "my nation" in accordance with the usage of his time, he completely ignores that nation's common history and rejects all aspirations for Jewish autonomy in a Jewish land. It is not a common country, he contends, which binds one Jew to another; it is a set of specific laws and commandments<sup>28</sup> whose ultimate purpose is to guide the seeking mind to divine truths, and to establish a link between thought and action, theory and practice.<sup>29</sup> By observing these commandments, Jews worship the universal God in a particular way that He has chosen for them, or for which He has chosen them.

These statements, however, raise some disturbing questions. Why, one may ask, did God not only single out the Jew as sole recipient of those laws but also make his salvation dependent upon their strict observance? And by what logic is human reason declared to be autonomous where comprehension of "eternal truths" is concerned, yet in need of revelation

24. Ibid, p. 71.

25. Ibid, p. 129.

26. There is a certain similarity between Mendelssohn's and M.M. Kaplan's concept of *mizvot* as Judaism's distinctive characteristic and unifying bond. But, for Mendelssohn, who believes in their divine origin, *mizvot* are sacrosanct, while for Kaplan, who sees them as elements of an evolving religious civilization, they are sancta.

27. E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 85.

28. An argument repeated about two generations later by Samson Raphael Hirsch.

29. A. Jospe, *Op. cit.*, p. 99.



with regard to ritual and ceremonial ordinances? Mendelssohn the traditional Jew appears here to have dislodged Mendelssohn the rationalist philosopher, for he writes:

He [God] granted a revelation to the Israelites not because men, as men, could otherwise not attain salvation, but because He deemed it wise to bestow on this particular people some particular grace.<sup>30</sup>

This says, by implication, that God's will is unfathomable, and that man's celebrated reason is, after all, quite limited. And the same thought is expressed in another context, in a letter that Mendelssohn wrote to a frequent correspondent, Thomas Abbt, a professor of philosophy. Responding to a question about the "purpose of God's creatures," the pious rationalist counsels Abbt to realize that there comes a point where "despite all our searching inquiries [a] wise 'I do not know' remains our last resort."<sup>31</sup>

Though he was aware of the potential tension between faith and reason, neither Mendelssohn's professional writings nor his letters show that he himself suffered from a conflict between these two fundamentally different approaches to reality. He apparently found it possible to combine both, or to alternate between them; this would seem to be borne out by a note in his *Bi'ur* which, commenting on Exodus 23:19, reads:

God has given us many commandments without revealing their purpose to us. However, it should be sufficient for us to know that they were commanded by Him . . . Their value lies in their practice, not in the understanding of their origin or their purpose.<sup>32</sup>

There is a point where the wise man stops asking questions, where excessive rationality becomes irrational, turning man into a "sophist whose ears are buzzing with so many doubts and brooding questions that he can no longer hear the voice of common sense."<sup>33</sup> Far from being a sophist, the Jewish philosopher therefore listened to that voice and, giving in to an emotional need, enjoyed uninhibitedly the warmth of religious celebrations with his family (as he mentions in what must have been one of his last letters, dated December 17, 1785). It may well have been this need, along with an ingrained traditionalism, which contributed to certain inconsistencies in his religious thought — inconsistencies to which all attempts to syncretize the basically divergent premises of philosophy and religion seem to be susceptible.<sup>34</sup>

Still, Mendelssohn believes that it makes good sense to syncretize

29. E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 113.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 161

32. A. Jospe, *Op. cit.*, p. 149

33. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

34. There are other, almost ironical, inconsistencies in Mendelssohn's thought. The archetypical postulator of tolerance, the guardian of "our most precious jewel, our freedom of thought," considered it imperative that "freethinkers" and their "amoral atheism" "be immediately fought by all men concerned with mankind's welfare. Here, the most direct line of attack is doubtlessly the best" (E Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, pp. 143 and 136).

different points of view as long as each has some specific value; and so he proceeds to formulate his own general (as distinct from his Jewish) philosophy. Almost everything he wrote, including *Morning Hours* (a collection of discourses that he had held for his young son, Joseph, and his friends, the brothers Humboldt), *Philosophical Writings* and many of his letters, attest to his proclivity for metaphysics. But it is his treatise, *On the Soul* (originally written in Hebrew), and his *Phaedon* (which he kept so close to Plato's dialogue of the same name that the result was a "blend of translation and original composition"),<sup>35</sup> which epitomize his philosophical thought.

Both works deal with ultimate questions, and particularly with the immortality of the soul. But it is Mendelssohn's Socrates who, in *Phaedon*, expounds also the meaning of life, the destiny of man, problems of good and evil and of divine justice, utilizing for his discourses arguments borrowed from widely divergent (and chronologically scrambled) thought-systems. One tends, subsequently, to agree with the author's disarming statement that his philosophy is not "epoch-making" in the sense of offering startlingly new theories. Nevertheless, it is compelling and occasionally moving in its serene acceptance of man's human condition, and its earnest perusal of metaphysical insights that might give meaning to that human condition.

Whether the sources from which these insights are drawn have sprung from the soil of ancient Palestine or of Greece, from seventeenth century Holland, or from the France, England and Germany of, or near, his own time mattered little to the intentionally eclectic Mendelssohn. The light of reason, like that of the sun, will shine on and must be shared with all thinking men, he says. Moreover, "wisdom knows only a universal fatherland," and to "distinguish between mine and thine" in the world of ideas may be important to the scholar but not to the genuine lover of truth who realizes that many minds — some greater than his own — have already grappled with the same questions. Mendelssohn, therefore, does not hesitate to acknowledge his indebtedness to "Plotinus, Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten and others."<sup>36</sup> And being interested, not in the novelty of an idea but in what he considers to be its demonstrable cogency, rationality and truth, he prefers even to make "use of an anachronism rather than omit any convincing argument."<sup>37</sup>

Under the impress of Greek eudaemonism, Mendelssohn sees the promotion of man's happiness and society's welfare as central to all thinking and all doing. To become truly happy, man must develop to the

35. Ibid, p. 184.

36. Ibid, pp. 184/186. This denial of his originality may indicate more than merely a frank self-appraisal or personal modesty (though Mendelssohn was, by all accounts, modest indeed). It may also reflect a Jewish tradition which expects even the expositor of a new idea to refer to the opinion of "our sages," "our rabbis," etc., in deference to, and appreciation of, the superior wisdom of one's spiritual progenitors.

37. "What Mendelssohn wished to present," says Alexander Altmann, "was a Socrates *redivivus* who spoke the language of the modern Enlightenment" (Altmann, *Op.cit.*, p. 150).

highest possible degree all of his faculties, mental as well as physical, and put them to the best possible use. Most of all, he must strive to increase his knowledge and understanding, so as to come closer to life's dual objective: happiness on earth, and salvation in the beyond. Happiness on earth means to contribute, in whatever form, to the happiness of others. Salvation in the beyond means that state of near-perfection in which the soul can fully comprehend truth, beauty and the will of God.

Mendelssohn's views, voiced by Socrates, about man's salvation in the beyond are, of course, predicated on his belief in the immortality of the soul. On the premise (already accepted in an early essay, "On Evidence in the Metaphysical Sciences," which had been awarded the first prize in a contest sponsored by the Royal Academy of Sciences) that the assumptions of metaphysics are as verifiable as those of science, he offers several syllogistically reasoned proofs for the soul's ongoing life, derived from Platonic, Judaic and Leibnizian notions. They are a rather strange mixture of philosophical and religious elements which do not always blend smoothly. Yet, though the cogency of the proofs leaves much to be desired, the purity of Mendelssohn's faith and convictions is most impressive. For example, he has Socrates say, near the end of his life:

If the soul were mortal, man's reason would be but a dream . . . Virtue would lose that radiance which makes it appear divine. The beautiful and the sublime — in the moral as well as the physical realm — would no longer serve as image of divine perfection. Man's lot would be the same as an animal's: to forage for food, and die . . . I do not know how those who fear the soul's eventual destruction can ever overcome their anxiety . . . Robbed of his hope for immortality, man would be the most miserable creature on earth, his misery compounded by the fact that his ability to think about his condition awakens in him the fear of death and a sense of despair.<sup>38</sup>

Despite these reflections, Mendelssohn was less interested in purely theoretical speculation, with its esoteric abstractions, than in a practical philosophy with its potential for guiding men toward a purposefully lived, hence "happy" life. And this, in turn, motivated him "to search for truth, to love beauty, to desire the good, to do the best."<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, he looked among the existing philosophical systems for the one whose *Weltweisheit* could be turned into *Lebensweisheit*, a set of values by which to live and to become what men were meant to be: enlightenedly humane, hence genuinely human.

Does this mean that Moses Mendelssohn was a popularizer, a *Popularphilosoph*? Several historians of philosophy, among them Germany's well-known Wilhelm Windelband, think so. Alexander Altmann does not, at least not if the term is used derogatorily, implying shallowness of thought or superficial argumentation. The fact that Mendelssohn was

38. E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn*, pp. 196/197 — The last sentence reads as if it anticipated a Heideggerian existentialism with its all-pervasive awareness of man's *Sein-zum-Tode*.

39. Quoted by Altmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 305.

40. *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, (Tübingen, 1957), p. 383.

popular does not make him a popularizer. His work needs no apology; its seriousness speaks for itself. In fact, he deplored all superficiality and criticized other writers of the Enlightenment for their tendency to popularize.<sup>41</sup>

The designation "popular philosopher" is, however, used correctly if it is understood to mean that Mendelssohn ascribed to philosophy a practical purpose, a means of educating men's hearts as well as their minds. And in this he succeeded, notwithstanding the already mentioned fact that some of the seams do show in his world-view, that composite of secular European philosophy and traditional Jewish piety.

That it is this very success which eventually led to the assimilation or even total defection of large numbers of nineteenth and twentieth century Jews is an often-heard, yet unwarranted, accusation. True, Mendelssohn did advise his "coreligionists" to "adopt the mores of the country in which you find yourselves;" yet he immediately added, "but be steadfast in upholding the religion of your fathers, too" — an admonition conveniently overlooked by his critics.

The Jew living in an open society may find it difficult, indeed, to maintain a sound equilibrium between the countervailing forces that declare him to be the same as, yet distinct from, all others. But to blame Mendelssohn for the fact that with freedom of choice goes also the freedom to make the wrong choice, and that his descendants (in the narrow as well as the widest sense) have all too frequently availed themselves of this option, is entirely unjustified. It would be more correct to say that Mendelssohn, who did not care for history, made history: by working both for and on his "nation," he contributed in no small measure to the emergence — rather than the disappearance — of the modern Jew.

One may reject the definition of Judaism as revealed legislation as an impoverishing reduction of a many-faceted entity. Or one may see in the assertion that Judaism demands religious practice rather than religious belief an astonishing disregard of the fact that strict observance of the law is a logical corollary of the belief in that law's divine authority. But whether or not one accepts Mendelssohn's religious thought *in toto* or only in part, and whether or not one considers him a philosophical innovator, one must acknowledge that his work, as well as the conduct of his life, were informed with an intent of rare nobility, and that it is through the direct or indirect impact of both that we have become what we are today.

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41. In a 1759 review of contemporary trends, cited by Prof. Altmann.

42. A. Jospe, *Op. cit.*, p. 104. Samson Raphael Hirsch sums up the same notion in his maxim: *Torah im derekh erez*, Torah as well as the customs of the country.

# *Steps Toward Feminine Imagery of Deity in Jewish Theology*

RITA M. GROSS

THE MOST PROFOUND, INTRIGUING AND INVITING of all Jewish theologies — the Kabbalah — teaches us that *galut* — exile — is the fundamental reality and pain of present existence. It teaches that one of the causes of *galut* is the alienation of the masculine from the feminine in God, the alienation of God and the *Shekhinah*. But it also teaches, especially in its Lurianic phases, that each of us can effect the turning of *galut* by dedicating all our efforts to the reunification of God and the *Shekhinah*. Now that the masculine and feminine have been torn asunder and the feminine dismembered and banished, both from the discourse about divinity and from the human community, such a *tikkun* — reparation — is obligatory (a *mizvah*). When the masculine and feminine aspects of God have been reunited and the female half of humanity has been returned from exile, we will begin to have our *tikkun*. The world will be repaired.

I can no longer remember the first time I imagined a *b'rakhah* in the female grammatical form. I do remember the first time I heard it voiced aloud communally, years after having first experienced participation in my own right in the Jewish ritual covenant community. It was as appropriate and natural as any Jewish expression — and less problematic and alienating than many. In fact, the potential for meaning and identification experienced by saying “God-She” convinced me that it must be so. Since then, I have been using female pronouns of God relatively frequently in various contexts — teaching, reflection, private religious expressions. As the linguistic forms and the sound of the words become less exotic, it no longer seems daring or unconventional to speak of God in such a manner. Instead, it seems appropriate, natural, what one would expect, the way things would be except for a massive skewing and programming of religious consciousness. And in a way that is unsurpassed, it also frees from alienation, anger, pain, and sorrow over the exclusion of women from the religious and spiritual dimensions of being Jewish.

Therefore it is time to move beyond the image of God the Father to a more complete set of images of God. To do so requires some clarity about what is at stake in the use of the image of “God the Father.” The most crucial points, I believe, are thorough awareness of the inherent limita-

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RITA M. GROSS is an alumna and founding member of the Upstairs Minyan of the University of Chicago Hillel Foundation. She now teaches comparative religions at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

tions of any theological or religious language, combined with some awareness of the inevitability of anthropomorphic images in the Jewish religious enterprise.

Before anything else can be properly discussed, one must understand the inevitable limitations of all religious language. *All* expressions used in the religious enterprise are, in the long run, analogous and metaphorical. Every statement contains a bracketed “as if,” or “as it were.” Statements about God should not be taken literally. They do not exhaust the possibilities at all. Rather, they are the most adequate expressions available within current idioms — linguistic conventions which function as tools used to point to that which transcends language. Therefore, they contain no inherent finality, or unalterable relevance, and convey no ultimate truth. To ignore this limitation by fixating on one set of ideas and thinking that a real correspondence exists between these images of God and God is to be unrealistic, self-aggrandizing, and fundamentally idolatrous.

Nevertheless, because expression and communication are inevitable, images and concepts of the Ultimate are also inevitable. Therefore, the limitations of language present no problem — if one is willing to remember those limits whenever one is tempted to literalize and absolutize one’s language.<sup>1</sup> The only problem is that temptation.

It is clear that the tendency to absolutize some manners of speaking about God has been very strong throughout the history of the Jewish tradition. Specifically, masculine pronouns are always used of God by traditionalists and even by atheists and philosophical critics of anthropomorphism. Closely linked to the masculine pronouns, especially in the imagination of traditionalists, is a whole array of masculine images — father, king, judge, warrior. At the same time, an automatic and very strong prejudice against using feminine pronouns and images exists in the minds, not only of traditionalists, but also of atheists and philosophical critics of anthropomorphism. They usually justify that response by appealing to the inherent limitations of language. They contend that their automatic use of male pronouns and images as well as their out-of-hand rejection of female images and pronouns does not mean anything; certainly it does not mean, they contend, that they think of God as male. “That God is exalted above all sexuality is part of *His* transcendence,” one commonly hears. However, if one insists that one must use the pronoun “His” in the preceding sentence and that the pronoun “Her” is improper, the claim that gender-specific images are not part of one’s image of God becomes self-contradictory and a bit ridiculous. Likewise, the claim that one is not absolutizing one’s image of God becomes untenable. What is going on?

1. For a longer, more detailed statement of this argument, see Rita M. Gross, “Female God Language in the Jewish Context,” *Woman-spirit Rising*, ed. by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).



I suspect that those who become entangled in such absolutizing of masculine pronouns and imagery genuinely do believe in, and are trying to express, the concept of a God who transcends sexuality. At the same time, however, they wish to retain the concept of a personal God — a theistic rather than a non-theistic Ultimate — because the concept of a personal Ultimate is at the living heart of the Jewish symbol system. The whole *siddur*, most of *halakhah* and *aggadah*, in short, almost everything that makes the Jewish religious enterprise distinctively *Jewish* becomes non-sensical without the metaphor of a divine Person in a covenant relationship of mutual responsibility and love with human persons.

However, the metaphor of a gender-free person is impossible. Persons are male and female. A person without gender defies the imagination; few people can imagine a concrete, specific person without also imagining some female or male characteristics. Equally, no set of religious images has ever talked of a personal Ultimate without the use of masculine and/or feminine imagery as a tool. Theistic religions, including Judaism, have always had to make peace with antropomorphism, which necessarily includes making peace with genderized language about deity. Unless Jewish theology and practice take a 180 degree turn from the metaphor of relationship with a personal deity to the metaphor of a non-personal Ultimate, to which one could scarcely *davven* and which would be unlikely to command *mizvot*, they, too, will have to continue to utilize antropomorphisms, all of which are always problematic and inaccurate non-literal manners of speaking.

Why, then, the knee-jerk refusal to speak to God-She? To answer this question, we must move from the level of abstract theological analysis to the level of more empirical study of religion. Historical and cross-cultural study of religion demonstrates a great deal about how religious metaphors function in religious communities. Though language about God cannot really tell us about God, because of the limitations of language and the nature of God, it can tell us a great deal about those who create and use the God-language. The metaphors and concepts used to communicate about the inherently trans-linguistic Ultimate must come from somewhere; furthermore, it is impossible to avoid the recognition that they bear strong resemblance to basic human experience, especially valued aspects of human experience and aspiration.

What, then, of the common Jewish usage of “God-He” and shock at the idea that Jews might *davven* to God-She? I contend that it mirrors and legitimates the profoundly androcentric character of Jewish society, especially “spiritual Judaism” or the religious dimensions of being Jewish. It expresses a profound and longstanding alienation between women or femaleness and the central values of Jewish religious tradition — an alienation that I believe stretches to the origins of our tradition. That usage and the alienation which it reflects is also the most basic explanation for the traditional exclusion of women from almost all the most meaning-

ful and most normative dimensions of Judaism — its covenanted, “religious” and “spiritual” aspects.<sup>2</sup>

Courageous honesty is required to acknowledge the exclusion of women from those meaningful and important aspects of Jewish living. Perhaps it is more difficult yet to realize the extent to which that painful exclusion is bound up with traditional Jewish ways of speaking about the Ultimate as a male person but not a female person. Role reversal phantasy<sup>3</sup> may be the most potent way of driving home both points since, in role reversal phantasies, what is normally done to females becomes intolerable, simply because it is being done to males instead. Therefore, I ask you to imagine the following situation.

The male Jew grows up securely knowing his place in the community. Some day he will be a father in Israel, enabling his wife to fulfill her *mizvah* of reproduction, making himself available for her sexually by maintaining the laws of purity surrounding his body and its strange, periodic, regular secretions, and no less scrupulously maintaining the ritual purity of the food eaten in his home. Most important of all, he will pass on the faith of the mothers, at least until his daughters are five or six and start religious school. What more could any man want? Especially when he knows that God Herself intended this role for him, this special role which wins him a weekly moment's notice and praise, “A virile husband, who can find? He is far more precious than wealth, for he busies himself making wealth for his wife. She is praised in councils of the leaders for such a husband.”

He does not envy the world of women, the world of synagogue and school, for he has never really been taught about it. “It is better for Torah to be burned than to be entrusted to a man,” he has been told; and “She who teaches her son Torah teaches him lewdness.” Besides, “men are light-headed.” So only the women learn. Every morning they wrap themselves in those mysterious, wonderful prayer shawls. They look so comforting and so private, as if one could sense more strongly the love and warmth of God-Mother. But they are feminine garments, he has been told, even though there are no laws actually prohibiting men from wearing them. He would lose his masculinity and women would be defeminized if he started *davvening* in a *tallit*, assuming that he *davvens* at all, which no one has ever seemed much concerned about. As for *tefillin* . . . don't even think of that. The synagogue, with its beautiful haunting rituals and melodies further justifies this division of labor between women and men, spiritual and physical. The preciousness of being Jewish is especially clear to him when he watches the Torah scrolls being taken out and seven women being called to read Torah. Perhaps the highest moment comes as he watches the Torah scroll, that supreme masculine symbol that contains the essence of the Jewish faith. From behind the high curtains you can almost see what's going on in most synagogues, even though it's very far from the reader's stand and often very

2. For more detailed discussion, see Rachel Adler, “The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman,” *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (Summer 1973): 77–89, and Rita M. Gross, “On Being a Religious Jewish Woman,” *Ancient Roots and Modern Meanings: A Contemporary Reader in Jewish Identity*, edited by Jerry Diller (New York: Bloch Pub. Co., 1978).

3. I am indebted to Nette Morton's Christian role reversal phantasy in *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church: No More Silence* (New York: Association Press, 1976), pp. 29–31, for inspiration. Several sentences have been quoted directly.

difficult to hear the reader above the din of gossiping men's voices. But it *must* be that way. Think how disruptive it would be if men ritually took part in the synagogue *davvening*. Why, the women might even be distracted by the presence of sex objects erupting into their world of spirituality. To protect the women's concentration at prayer, it is necessary to separate the men and put them out of the way.

If there are vague feelings of discontent, the very words of Torah hasten to quench them. After all, God is always referred to as "She" — even though everyone says that doesn't mean we should think of God in a sexual sense, since God is beyond all human qualities. But language is limited and we use the most honorific terms for God, despite their obvious limitations. All the prophets were women — except for a few whom nobody talks about much and God *chose* Sarah, our Mother, and the promise descended through the line of her daughters. The covenant is addressed to the *b'not Rachel v' Leah*, which means the *daughters*, not the *children*, of Rachel and Leah. And finally, God will send her *goelet*, and she will end the suffering of the daughters of Rachel and Leah — we pray in those terms all the time — *b'rukhah at ha-shem, elohenu malkat ha-olam, elohai Sarah, elohai Rivkah, elohai Rachel v' Leah, ha-elah ha g'dolah, ha giborah, v ha-noraah. Elah elyonah, gomelet hasadim tovim, v'konah et ha-kol, v'zokheret hazdei 'imahot um'vi'a goelet l'vnot b'notehen l'ma-an sh'ma b'ahavah*. When God gave her Torah to her daughters through Miriam, she said to the women, "Do not go near a man," before the theophany . . . just as men should not intrude into the women's spiritual universe today.

Besides, the outside world also reinforces this natural division of labor. All important positions in education and business are filled by women. One rarely sees a male professor and his voice sounds funny — too low. Recently they hired a male to be a newscaster, and a lot of people thought that was noteworthy and strange. There has never been a male president of the United States either, though the last president got a lot of publicity by appointing two men — an unheard of proportion — to her cabinet.

When we try to explain all of this, it is obvious. Whether or not people believe in God-Mother any more, it is clear that this division of labor is grounded in nature itself and we religious Jews know that God Herself intended things this way. Why, any discontented male is denying his true vocation bestowed on him by the Creator Herself. No one is wise enough to know why God made female reproductive organs compact and internal so that woman is physically free to move about unencumbered and take her natural place of leadership in the world of womankind. Or why she made the male's organs external and exposed so that he would demand sheltering and protection from the outside in order that he may be kept for reproducing the race. The very vulnerability of the penis is a paradigm of all vulnerable things in need of protection, which explains why men are naturally more nurturing than women. Surely this is why God Herself made men that way. And if men, dismissed from the time-bound *mizvot* because of their heavy involvement in nurturing roles, which come to them naturally, ever feel deprived, they should only remember that God is already close to men and that they, naturally, without benefit of the covenant, do God's will and are close to God. That is why she gave the covenant through women instead.

Furthermore, men don't need those *mizvot*, which seem to be the core of Judaism, because what they do is to create for women a sense of rhythms and cycles and flow. Women can't do that without ritual but men already experience that in the periodic, mysterious, risings and fallings of their bodies,

imitated by the tides and many other natural phenomena . . . Surely we don't want to disrupt all these harmonies and balances created by God Herself in her Wisdom.

Theological analysis of the nature of God-language, combined with some understanding of the social origins and ramifications of specific images of deity are my major arguments for abandoning forthwith traditional modes of religious expression that utilize masculine imagery of deity while refusing to use feminine imagery of deity. The social destructiveness of the exclusively masculine style of religious expression, so evident in the role reversal phantasy, is of more concern to me than its theological inadequacies. It would seem that the Jewish sense of justice would demand that such inhumane practices be transformed.

Frequently, those who realize the inappropriateness of the exclusively masculine language and imagery of traditional Jewish religious expressions want to opt for a style of language that speaks of the Ultimate as "neither male nor female." At a certain level of philosophic analysis that is, of course, a viable and perhaps even a more adequate concept than the theistic and, therefore, inherently anthropomorphic imagery of a personal God in covenanted relationships. I will concede to them the use of female pronouns and imagery of deity, but, obviously, only in return for an equal ban on all masculine pronouns and images of deity — since their case is that God should be imaged as *neither male nor female*. I await their *siddur* in English, let alone in Hebrew.

It seems much more feasible *and traditional* to take some steps towards feminine imagery of deity in Jewish theology. The first step is theologically relatively simple and unproblematic, though emotionally profound. It requires only that female language, especially pronouns, be used of deity in *all* the familiar contexts. It seems to me that for every assertion which one wishes to make of God, one must be willing to say that it characterizes God-She as well as God-He. In other words, the familiar *ha-kadosh barukh hu* is also *ha-k'doshah b'rukhah hee* and *always has been*. Only the poverty of our religious imagination and the repressiveness of our social forms prevented that realization. Everything that has ever been said or that we still want to say of *ha-kadosh barukh hu* can also be said of *ha-k'doshah b'rukhah hee* and, conversely, "God-She" is appropriately used in every context in which any reference to God occurs. Whenever the symbol or metaphor "God" is still relevant in any way, then we must imagine "God-She" and speak to Her.

That first step must be experienced to understand its subtle but overwhelming and profound effect. However, the pronouns begin to blossom into full-blown images, which is another and much more revolu-

4. For a fuller discussion of these images, as well as all the issues that are involved in re-discovering female imagery of deity and utilizing non-Western resources as a tool, see Rita M. Gross, "Hindu Female Deities as a Resource in the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, (September 1978): 269-291.

tionary step, whether the images are female versions of traditional male images of God or whether they have little precedent in Jewish tradition. That development of full-blown female imagery of deity is difficult and revolutionary because it goes beyond traditional Jewish sources, both in expression and for inspiration. Immediately, the problem of resources for developing feminine imagery of deity is more pressing than the problem of expressing those images in Jewish modes. Psalms, prayers, midrashim, etc., will follow, once the imagery really takes hold in the imagination.

Two major reservoirs for developing feminine imagery of God exist. First, it is important to highlight the rather considerable amount of feminine imagery of deity that has already developed throughout the history of Jewish tradition. Few Jews really take the time to put all the scattered feminine imagery together and realize the inroads which this combined resource makes on assumptions that "God-He" is proper while "God-She" is improper.

Nevertheless, that resource, by itself, is probably not enough. It is too imbedded in patriarchal contexts. Almost entirely, traditional Jewish usage speaks of some variant of "God and *his Shekhinah*. Seeing feminine imagery of God as some sort of attachment to, or appendage of, the more familiar male images of God would only compound the current inadequacies. Something like the co-equal balance of the attributes of justice and mercy is a much better model for the relationship between the attributes of femininity and masculinity in deity.

Because both the co-equal balance of maleness and femaleness in metaphors about God and a full-blown feminine imagery of God go beyond Jewish resources, these developments, though desirable, are difficult. When I first began to think about these necessary outgrowths of saying "*ha-k'doshah b'rukhah hee*," my mind simply stopped, as if it had encountered an impenetrable veil. Fortunately, however, I am by training and conviction a student of the cross-cultural comparative study of religion, and my exposure to feminine imagery of deity in other religious contexts proved to be a godsend, so to speak. Religious symbol systems that have not been so wary of feminine imagery of deity are the second great source of inspiration in developing feminine imagery of deity.

People often seem more upset by my suggestion that religious insights and images important for Jews can be found outside Jewish tradition than they are by the clear imperative to develop female imagery of God. That attitude seems very strange to me, since it would require some sort of antiseptic barrier between what Jews think and what other people are thinking. Such conditions have never prevailed and many elements of the worldview of most contemporary religious Jews depend significantly on the thought of non-Jews. Furthermore, I am not advocating mindless borrowing or wholesale syncretism. I have in mind something more like Jewish translations of the results of years-long apprenticeships in the

relevant religious symbol systems.

Years of living with both the lack of Jewish female imagery of God and with knowledge about non-Jewish Goddesses have led me to envision five basic images that need translation into Jewish media.<sup>4</sup> I am sure that they are not the only relevant images and that the resources I have drawn upon are not the only relevant ones. They are offered as a starting point. It is especially important to note both their continuity with traditional Jewish concepts about God and the subtle ways in which they go beyond and enrich traditional Jewish theology. The remainder of this paper begins such translation and evaluation.

The most significant of these five images involves a combination of symbols that is usually called "the coincidence of opposites" or "ambiguity symbolism." This image of the Goddess is very close to many Jewish insights about God who creates both light and darkness, who has both the attribute of justice and the attribute of mercy, but it also develops these Jewish insights in significant ways. The images of the divine feminine who contains all opposites and manifests the coincidence of those opposites have more ability to communicate the acceptance of limits and finitude than anything in Jewish resources. The basic message is the coincidence and relativity of "positive" and "negative," "good" and "bad," "creation" and "destruction." The Goddess gives and She takes away, not out of transcendent power but because that is the way things are. She patronizes both birth and death, and neither is desired or undesirable. Both are part of the order of existence. Birth without death would be a monstrosity — a cancer. Life feeds on life and death is the giver of life. They imply each other and in the long run they are the same. What is born must die and what dies nourishes life in some form or other. Two things should be especially noted. In this symbolism, the deity does not stand outside and above this round but, rather, *is* the round. Secondly, therefore, limits, endpoints, death are not punishments from an external transcendent deity but simply part of reality and neither positive nor negative. Receptivity to the given, rather than willful attempts to remake the given, characterize the response to the deity who is the eternal round of growth and decay, birth and death, increase and decrease.

Within this matrix, four additional images of the Goddess find expression in my vision. Some of them are most significant for their power to break stereotypes of the feminine and others for the insights about deity that they contain.

It is important to discuss the need for images of Goddess as an extremely capable and strong figure — one worthy of trust and able to aid. This kind of image, which runs counter to popular expectations, is found in every example of imagery of the divine feminine in world religions. It undercuts the objection which I sometimes hear that the deity can only be imaged as male because God must be strong and trustworthy and female imagery cannot invoke those responses. Goddess can be fully as strong,



even as omnipotent, as God. Thus the Goddess breaks the stereotype of feminine weakness, which is important for women. Secondly, there is no hint that this strength and capability is at the expense of the femaleness of the Goddess. In fact, if anything, the images and stories of the hero Goddess exaggerate her female characteristics and her beauty; thus, another stereotype is broken — that strength and femininity or beauty are incompatible, especially in women.

The next two images of the Goddess that I envision as part of feminine imagery of the divine within Jewish theology are somewhat interdependent and need to be discussed together since, in combination, they also break many stereotypes. Images of God the Mother are inevitable and to be expected. It is important immediately to join that image with the image of Goddess equally involved with culture in all its aspects.

The Motherhood of God. One of the strangest and most inexplicable features of Judaism to me is that while images of parenting are so central, “God the Mother” brings a shudder to people who daily use metaphors of God the Father. How can it be? How can God be a parent but not a Mother? How can the Creator and Caretaker of the world be devoid of femaleness? Nothing seems more obvious than that the current imagery of the Father without the Mother is a bit one-sided and unbalanced, to say the least.

On the other hand, it is equally important to point out that God the Mother is not just a mother and nothing else. The fact that when most people do image a female deity, they talk only of some sort of “fertility Goddess” and nothing else, reflects the way we think of women today — they are mothers, nothing else. Goddess as patron of culture breaks the stereotype that the feminine and women are involved mainly with nature and reproduction, while culture and the spirit are male and masculine pursuits. Instead, we would find Goddess involved in the broad range of valued Jewish traits and activities, from defense, study, and livelihood to nurturance and housekeeping, without regard for whether men or women are expected to perform these tasks in society. Especially noteworthy would be images of Goddess as giver of wisdom and patron of scholarship and learning, as teacher and meditator, already found to some extent in traditional Judaism but in need of much, much more emphasis.

The last image that I will discuss is as significant as my first one and often even more disturbing. Once we begin to speak of deity in both female and male terms, sexuality re-emerges as a significant metaphor for imaging both intra-divine relating and the divine-human relationship. This is sometimes disturbing because people imagine that the traditional images of deity, God the Father, the God of our fathers, is a non-sexual symbol. We have already seen how impossible it is to have a concept of a theistic Ultimate that is also exalted above all sexuality. What really seems to have occurred is that God has been exalted above only female sexuality, which, in turn, results in the destruction of the personhood of human

persons who do not directly image what is taken to be Divine Personhood, rather than a gender-free image of God.

Using sexuality as a religious metaphor will add a great deal to the texture of Jewish religious expression. To see part of its enriching effect, it is necessary to ask why there has been some reluctance to use sexuality as a religious symbol in Jewish tradition, though that reluctance is not omnipresent, as we can see in segments of Kabbalistic imagery. The rejection of sexuality as an acceptable religious symbol is, I believe, closely connected with fear and rejection of our embodied condition, particularly the female body. Because we are embarrassed by our own sexuality, we reject it as a symbol suitable for the deity, but those aspects of ourselves that are not embarrassing to us — honor, fidelity, justice, military prowess, the ability to arrange our societies hierarchically, with rulers and ruled — do become symbols of deity. Why should sexuality be so problematic?

The answer brings us back to the first image that I discussed — the coincidence of opposites — and, indeed, there is a strong correlation between the occurrence of a coincidence of opposites symbolism and the use of sexual symbolism in world religions. Sexuality is strongly connected with the experience of limits and with the kind of transcendence that the coincidence of opposites symbolism teaches us. Sexuality limits us to being one sex or the other, and sexuality is closely connected with the limitations of our birth and death. If we did not die, we would not need to be sexed. Rebellion against the closed round of our natural existence and attempts to identify with a non-temporal principle transcending that closed round necessarily deny any ultimate significance to the primary method of continuity within that round — sexuality. When sexuality loses its significance as a sign of the Ways Things Are, one can pretend that women/Goddess don't exist significantly (or that men/God don't exist significantly, I suppose, though it didn't happen that way). Thus, one has lost at the same time the symbolism of the coincidence of opposites in the Great Round of Birth and death, the realism of sexuality as a primary metaphor for expressing of our deepest insights about reality, and Goddess. I think that they all return together. This combination also brings with it a different kind of transcendence, the kind of transcendence that comes with discovering the meaning available *within* the circle of existence. Reconciliation — with ourselves, our bodies, our limits — is the gift of Goddess.

My remarks on the imagery of the Goddess, which I think take us far beyond the simple insertion of female pronouns into familiar contexts, seem to have stressed two points over and over. One is that we need Goddess because She breaks stereotypes of the feminine and thus frees women from the limitations of that stereotype. Women can be strong *and* beautiful, feminine *and* wise teachers, mothers *and* participants in culture. If Goddess provided that much it would have been enough. But it seems that She brings much more. Dimensions of deity that have been lost or

severely attenuated during the long centuries when we spoke of God as if S/He were only a male are restored. They seem to have to do with acceptance and immanence, with nature and the cyclic round. Metaphors of enclosure, inner spaces, and curved lines seem to predominate. What a relief from the partial truth of intervention and transcendence; of history and linear time; of going forth, exposure and straight lines! For insights that are true but incomplete, when elevated into the totality of truth, become false and dangerous. Goddess completes the image of God and brings wholeness. One begins to sense that God, as well as women, has been imprisoned in patriarchal imagery.<sup>5</sup> That discovery is at once scary, painful and exhilarating.

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5. For a brilliant demonstration of this point, see Carol Christ, "The Liberation of Women and the Liberation of God," *The Jewish Woman*, ed. by Elizabeth Koltun, (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 11-17.

# Three Mothers

FREEMA GOTTLIEB

## *Introduction*

THIS IS AN ANALYTICAL INTERPRETATION of the conflict in the consciousness of Deborah the prophetess in her role as national "Mother." There seems to be a discrepancy between her natural capacities and the cultural appropriateness of her doing what she was forced to undertake. This split between the "manly" heroic and the female part of herself is reflected in a falling-out with her male counterpart, the Jewish general Barak, thus necessitating a series of projections upon two other "mothers" — Yael and the mother of Sisera — before the deliverance of Israel can be complete.

## *I. Deborah and Barak*

Deborah seems to have regarded her role as both judge and prophetess as essentially an extension of the biological function, referring to herself with pride as a "Mother-in-Israel" though, from the text, there is no mention of her having had any children of her own, apart from the whole Jewish people.<sup>1</sup>

We might like to contrast the ideal of Jewish motherhood as embodied in the matriarchs with the role of the prophetess. Sarah, Rivkah, Raḥel and Leah, all four are private people, each jealously preoccupied with her own children, her husband and home, though hospitable enough to any passing stranger.

By comparison with the "tents" of the matriarchs, Deborah's domain has to be very much in the public eye. She sits out of doors, under a single and shadeless palm-tree, exposed to the gaze of all passers-by.<sup>2</sup> The Rabbis say that she chose that particular environment precisely because of its lack of privacy, and because it offered little opportunity to be really alone with the many men who came to pour out their problems to her.

However much the Rabbis try to stress the exceptionally womanly virtues — such as this one of modesty — which Deborah brings to her leadership role, the question still remains of the legitimacy, from the rabbinic standpoint, of a woman's holding such an office at all.<sup>3</sup> Queens

1. Judges 5:7.

2. *Mezudot David* on Judges 4:5.

3. The question of how Deborah could act as judge is raised in *Shavuot*, Ch. 4. The *Baalei ha-Tosafot* comment (page 29, column 2) that, although people disqualified from giving testimony are also disqualified from officiating as judges, this does not apply to women who

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FREEMA GOTTLIEB is a free-lance writer and researcher and a former assistant professor of literature.

do not rule in their own right because "the glory of the king's daughter reigns within" (Psalms 45).<sup>4</sup> That women have energies and greatness is undisputed; it is just that the outlet for these talents has traditionally been limited, on the whole, to the sphere of personal relations. How, then, could Deborah have been a judge when, according to Jewish law, women are held to be ineligible for giving official testimony? Unlike her male counterparts, say some of the commentators, Deborah made no political pronouncements, her authority being limited to the impact that her personality had upon individuals.<sup>5</sup>

During the years of the Canaanite slavery, Deborah sits quietly under her palm-tree dispensing judgments; when her influence spreads, the morale of the people rises accordingly. When the time comes to take a political stand, Deborah calls in the Israelite general to do the actual fighting.

The man whom she summons is Barak, whose name means "lightning," suitable partner for the "fiery woman" or "wife of *Lapidot* (flames)," as she is described in the text.<sup>6</sup> Both personalities being associated with light and fire, some commentators have suggested that Barak is really Deborah's husband and that she has to send for him as Moses did for Zipporah because, as recipient of prophetic visions, she lives apart from him. Whether or not we need accept that the direct dealings which they have with each other necessarily entail their having been husband and wife, what is important is the nature of their collaboration as national leaders. When Deborah sends for Barak it is for no domestic reunion, but because Israel is ripe for redemption. As if taking up the thread of some familiar household conversation, she interjects: "Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded you to go and rally ten thousand men. . . !" And again, in a parallel phrase: "Has not God gone out before you. . . !"<sup>7</sup>

Here the woman adopts the dominating part, exhorting, chiding, inspiring and igniting with her own tremendous spirit. There is a reversal of conventional roles. While God and His prophetess are to do all the work, the Israelites and their general are to be passive and await the outcome. The enemy seem to propel themselves forward and cast themselves upon the "edge of the sword" of the astonished Jewish armies; they apparently drop dead in heaps without their adversaries having to lift their arms to strike a blow.<sup>8</sup>

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are not eligible to give official testimony in the first place and are, therefore, not disqualified. In the light of Deborah's prophetic powers, she became a judge by popular appeal, according to the *Baalei ha-Tosafot* and also according to the *Yerushalmi*.

4. See the Gemara on *Shavuot* (page 30, column 1), "It is not the usual way for a woman to be a witness because 'the glory of the king's daughter reigns within.'"

See also Deut. 17:15: "When you appoint a king over yourselves . . ." The *Toledot Aharon* points out, on this verse — "a king and not a queen."

5. Malbim on Judges 4:5.

6. Ridak on Judges 4:4.

7. Malbim and Ridak on 4:6, 14.

8. Malbim on 4:16.

Deborah fairly assigns both their roles beforehand: 'You will lead the fighting men towards the Mountain, ready for the actual engagement, while I shall lure Sisera into the trap' (Judges 4:6, 7). Though it is given to the men to pursue the enemy, it is up to Deborah, or woman, to ensnare him to his fate. What Deborah has done is to give Barak and the men the credit, while she manipulates the action behind the scenes. Her manner of casting is the natural outcome of her own ambivalence about her female role. Although in her actual relationship with Barak Deborah naturally dominates, consciously she seems to uphold the cultural stereotype of the inward and inconspicuous nature of female power. She and Barak clash over her implicit assumption that women should remain in the background and his open avowal of dependency.

Only a soldier, Barak is very much in need of Deborah's actual presence there in camp. Impassionedly he appeals to her, with an attachment equalling that of Ruth for Naomi, that they not be separated: "If you go with me, I will go along, but if you do not then I will not go either" (Judges 4:8). Hardly dignified and courageous behavior on the part of a leader summoned by God, through His prophetess, to the redemption of His people!<sup>9</sup>

Barak may have been cowardly or he may simply have been realistic as to their relative strengths. According to the Midrash, however, he says to her: "If you go with me to the battlefield, I will then be able to accompany you in Song!" Aware of the superiority of the spiritual comment on victory over the actual physical fight, Barak so much wants to share with her in the singing that he thinks to bring this about by her putting in a token appearance on the battlefield. In the past, other leaders like Moses had combined in themselves the power of communication with God along with the makings of a good politician and military strategist. Barak may have felt that a collaboration with Deborah at close quarters might achieve the same effect. Also, he may have taken account of her psychological impact on his troops. Her being there in person would serve as a kind of "sign."

But Deborah finds disappointment on the national, as on the personal, level. It seems that Barak has been over-optimistic about the efficacy of her mere presence to draw the tribes to her and that her ambition to be a unifying factor for the nation, a "Mother-in-Israel," has failed here to a certain extent. Barak's "unmanly" reluctance to lead is mirrored by the small numbers who rally to his side, while the ranks of the enemy swell with volunteers from neutral powers. This idealism is counterbalanced, poetically speaking, only by the stars and angelic hosts enlisting on the Jewish side:

From heaven they fought  
The stars in their courses enlisted  
against Sisera (Judges 5:20).<sup>10</sup>

9. Malbim presents the Midrash on 4:8.

10. Rashi presents this Midrash.



Heavenly aid aside, those Israelite tribes whose landed interest was not directly threatened stayed aloof. Against these fainthearts Deborah rails:

Curse ye Meroz . . .

Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof.

Because they came not to the help of  
the Lord . . . (Judges 5:23).

Living in a society that builds its men up into martial heroes, Deborah takes it as a matter of course to spur Barak on to achievement. On the personal level, however, just as on the national one, she is disappointed; her expectations of the male, combined with the easy background role that she would have liked for herself, are entirely inadequate to the reality of the actual personalities concerned. By nature, Barak is obviously weaker than she, standing in a son's relation, rather than in a husband's, to her. Indeed, his refusal to move without her resembles nothing so much as the complaint of a querulous child unwilling to let go of its mother.

For such weakness Deborah has nothing but scorn. As woman, not as prophetess, she says to him, in essence: "O, I will come if you like, but the credit will then go into the hands of a woman . . ." (Judges 4:9). Far from being ambitious on her own, or other women's account, the prophetess is zealous for the men, wishing them to live up to what she conceives of as their obligations. In a healthy scheme of things, it is implied, women would never have such heroism forced upon them. There is a textual ambiguity as to which "woman" Deborah is referring to. She may have been pointing out that if she accompanies Barak victory will popularly be ascribed to her. On the other hand, she may have been speaking in her capacity as prophetess and predicting the part that, due to this sexual imbalance, the Bedouin Yael would be called on to play in the overthrow of the enemy.<sup>11</sup>

## II. *Yael and Sisera*

"Indeed, the glory will not fall to you on the way, but will be transferred into the hands of a woman . . ." (Judges 4:9). The spotlight passes to Yael, the drama shifting to her tent and to the weary runner making his way towards it.

Sisera may be continually losing speed, but Barak, although he is hot in pursuit, will never overtake him. The final blow is now securely in a woman's hands. In this contest, it is male strength that has proved the betrayer. Iron chariots and sheer weight of arms have made the Canaanite army founder in the marsh and it is Sisera's virility that proves his destruction.

In her "Song," Deborah, implicitly self-derogatory, points up the contrast between her national role and the domestic habits of Yael. A deliverance which the prophetess is capable only of setting in motion, the Bedouin woman is actually able to complete. She refers to Yael as "blessed

11. *Ridak* on 4:9

of women," "more than women," that is, more blessed than Deborah herself. In the domestic, intimate environment she feels Yael to be more "blessed" than she.

While Deborah castigates the Jewish men who chose to stay at home, she praises the Bedouin woman for doing just that:<sup>12</sup>

Blessed above women shall Yael be . . .

Above women that stay in the tent

Shall she be blessed . . . (Judges 5:24).

If Yael had decided not to stay at home on that particular day; if, instead, curiosity had lured her to the spectacle on the battlefield, she would have lost her opportunity to become the savior of Israel.

The Midrash picks up on the "tent" association that links Yael's domestic environment with that of the "Mothers in Israel." It is as if the matriarchs say to this stranger: "You have come to complete our work. If not for you, our travail would have been for nothing, our children destroyed."<sup>13</sup>

Rabbinic commentaries note that Yael belongs to the tribe of the Kenites, descendants of Jethro, father-in-law of Moses. When the young prince had had to flee the Egyptian court, he took refuge in the wilderness, enjoying hospitality in the tent of the High Priest of Midian. Now, among Jethro's descendants, says the Midrash, this deed reappears, the fugitive, the exile, the avenger of blood. . . .<sup>14</sup>

From the entrance to her tent Yael's eyes light upon the victim. Her husband being away from home, she asserts herself, takes the initiative, and goes out to meet Sisera, the whole incident being reminiscent of Abraham's hospitality to the three wayfarers. Here, however, there is a reversal of roles. The woman, this time round, does not stay indoors. Taking the man's part, she goes out to intercept her angel. As in that earlier episode, the chords of welcome and of trust are struck:

Turn aside, my lord; turn in to me. Fear not (Judges 4:18).

Like Abraham, too, she offers to her guest milk to drink. But while, on that occasion, Abraham bows before the messengers, here it is the fugitive who, overwhelmed by kindness, sinks to the ground at her feet.

The commentaries are divided as to whether she slept with him or not.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult, however, to understand how the "milk" which she gives him could have had such sedative properties as to enable her to get close enough to rain so many blows upon him unless it is taken as a

12. Contrast drawn by Ridak on 4:23-4.

13. Rashi on "blessed by the women who lived in tents," i.e., the matriarchs, citing Midrash *Bereshit Rabba*.

14. Midrash *Shemot Rabbah* on Exodus 4:2.

15. Reb Yohanan and Resh Lackish, two great friends, brothers-in-law, and learning partners, were divided in their opinions as to whether she did, or did not, sleep with him (*Nazir* 84 and Leviticus Midrash, sec. 10).

euphemism for sex,<sup>16</sup> that is, she offers to sleep with him in order to exhaust him sexually and facilitate the slaughter. This explanation is, in fact, hinted at in the Poem:

Water he asked, milk she gave him  
On a lordly dish, she brought him curds (Judges 5:25).

While he only dares ask “water,” the basic for survival, a place of asylum, she offers him more than he ever dared ask for.

The “Song” itself sings out the truth of how Sisera really fell.<sup>17</sup> Deborah is not affected by any spurious inhibition that might have kept her from proclaiming how that “blessed of women” got rid of Israel’s enemy. What happens is acted out, as it were, by the arrangement of lines in the poem:

Between her feet he fell, he *lay*.  
(They made love.)  
Between her feet he sunk, he fell (Judges 5:27),

a realistic description of the actual disposition of two bodies. There is a slight pause at the end of one line of the Poem that slithers and gives way to the next, as Yael gets ready for the blow.

Where he sank, there he lay down dead.

Why, despite the deliverance that it brought, does Yael’s action strike the modern reader as so repellent? Even the Rabbis, who try to whitewash what she did, express an essential repugnance in the discussion of her choice of weapons. Unlike the Jewish heroine, Judith, who seduces and kills an enemy general, Yael does not have the finesse to borrow a cleanly cutting sword. Instead, she picks up the first instruments to hand, a hammer and a tent-peg, intrinsic parts of the Bedouin way of life. The commentators point out that the normal procedure would have been for her to hold the tent-peg in her left hand and the hammer in her right, and the fact that she reverses this order indicates that there is something in her action that is completely opposed to nature.<sup>18</sup> They even say that she was not blessed “more than” other women, but “differently to” them. Most women would not envy her her way!

What, in fact, is so horrific in what Yael does? When we compare her story with that of Judith it becomes obvious that what Yael does is far more than simply to prostitute herself in order to save the Jewish people. When Judith slips behind the line of the enemy camp and presents herself before the general, Israel’s fortunes are at a very low ebb. In Yael’s case, however, Sisera comes to her already defeated. It is in his weakness that

16. Rashi on sedative properties of milk; *Mezudot David* on sexual exhaustion.

17. Malbim: “In the place where he fell — to have intercourse with her — there was he killed. Rabbi Yohanan said: That wicked wretch had 7-fold intercourse with her at that time, as it says: ‘At her feet he sunk, he fell, he lay,’ and ‘Three there were who fled from transgression.’”

18. Ridak on 4:21. She got the blessings of a man.

she triumphs over him and, in order to help finish him off, she breaks the sacred Bedouin bond of hospitality.

Whether Yael slept with Sisera or not is not important. The trust that she betrays is far more sacred than that of the love between man and woman, adults of equally balanced strengths. Only when we realize how much she offers him can we understand how much she lets him down. Her proffering of milk and warmth and hospitality, in fact, seem to be merely a way of extending her maternal ministrations to the stranger. And, after showing for her victim a mother's care, her *volte face* comes all the more as sacrilege.

Sisera is a male braggart, according to Deborah's "Song," trying to make an easy impression upon women with his military and soldierly gear. A commentator points out how difficult it must have been for this powerful man, after the defeat, "to have to expose physical weakness to a woman."<sup>19</sup> There is, of course, one particular male-female relation in which this is no shame at all — that between mother and son. Yael's unconditional acceptance of him in his hour of defeat puts Sisera entirely off guard and he turns to her with a new feeling of trust, like a child.

Between her feet he fell, he lay.

This final posture is an accurate description also of the act of birth, only here it culminates in a slaying.

Where he fell, there he lay down dead.

What has been broken is the primal human bond — that between mother and son.

### III. *Sisera's Mother*

Sisera is dead between Yael's feet.

His mother peers through the lattice and wails aloud.

The artistry of the Song, with its swift ironic transitions, reflects glory on the skill of the poet. Even after the death-blow, Deborah is not at peace until her feelings fix upon an actual mother with whose agonies of suspense there is complete identification.

Sisera's mother is the conservative ideal of woman and of mother. While she remains in her palace with her ladies, representative of the inner core of Canaanitish culture, Sisera and the men ransack the ends of the earth to bring riches home to her. Although her son is described in the text as holding only the rank of a general in the service of Jabin, king of Hazor, Sisera's mother is depicted as a kind of savage, Canaanitish queen many ranks higher than he. Her fate, however, as a woman is entirely dependent upon the actions of the man far away on the battlefield. Agonizedly she awaits his homecoming:

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19. Malbim on 5:27.

Why is his chariot so long in coming?  
 Why is the sound of his chariot wheels  
 so long delayed? (Judges 5:28).

Instinctively, she knows what has happened. The Malbim, a rabbinic commentator of the last century, recasts the whole choreography. The queen is like a medieval enchantress peering into her crystal and the doom that she sees there is converted into visual imagery — the figure of a man prostrate, blood oozing from his forehead, down his neck, and soaking into the earth beside him, while a woman rears over him in open triumph. This last, the victory of woman over man, the queen regards as the ultimate in depravity, a moral reversion that she simply cannot accept. Therefore, the queen and her attendants, the “wisest of her princesses,” hope magically to avert catastrophe by imposing an alternative, if far-fetched, explanation upon the prolonged absence of their menfolk: “Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil . . . ?” The progress of the Canaanite armies has been hampered, these women suggest, by the sheer weight of booty. As for the portent visualized by the Malbim, working from the premise that the different components of the dream-ensemble, when integrated, must signify Canaanite triumph, the callous princesses see the woman in the picture, representative of the choicest of the spoil, as a personification of Victory crowning the hero’s head with sexual and martial laurels.

Two contrasted women are given substance by Deborah’s imagination. As intensely female in her supercivilized fashion as Yael is in hers, the queen exists in an atmosphere of voluptuousness that is very different from the primitive animal quality emanating from the Bedouin. With her enchanted arts, she seeks to transform the hot immediacy of blood to the scarlet dyes of embroidery. Momentarily, the din and horror of masculine warfare subside as the ladies let their imaginations run riot with a blaze of color and embroideries, choosing to have their men return with spoil that they themselves would like as gifts:

The wisest of her princesses answer her,  
 Yes, she returns answer to herself:  
 “Are they not finding, are they not  
 dividing the spoil?”

...  
 To Sisera a spoil of dyed garments . . .  
 Two dyed garments of broi-dery for the  
 neck of every spoiler? (Judges 5:29–30).

The poet has this mother linger over the thought of victory which is imagined as some kind of glorified wedding. A similar idea is mentioned in the Bible in connection with the mother of King Solomon who presents her son with a crown on his “wedding day and the day of the rejoicing of his heart” (Song of Songs 3:11). Here, however, it is not a wedding that the Poet shows this mother as celebrating. Triumphant over

the Jewish armies in defeat, Sisera's mother sees this overthrow in sexual terms, gloating over the violation of Jewish maidens.

### *Finale*

Deborah's recoil from the public role that she is called on to play on the battlefield results in a displacement of the denied "mother" part of herself and in its projection upon two other women, who fleetingly and unsatisfactorily come to embody fragmentary longed-for parts of her consciousness.

Much of the power of Deborah's "Song" results from its sheer pace and rapid reversals of feeling. Immediately after the Poet has focused on Yael's death blow, hostilities are suspended temporarily and we are permitted entry into the consciousness of the mother of the stricken one with a compassion for human suffering and a sense of solidarity between women that transcends nationalities. This mother does not forfeit our pity even when, in suspense and dread, she turns to deluded thoughts of victory, the contrast with reality serving only to heighten the pathos. Our sympathy for her, however, is brought up short by the callous attitude that is attributed to her in connection with the Jewish girls whom she imagines her son to have taken captive:

One broodery, two brooderies  
For the neck of every spoiler.

being the equivalent of:

One womb, two wombs  
For every fighter (Judges 5:30).

She is represented as viewing them in terms of pure function. In primitive society, while the lives of the men of any enemy tribe could be dispensed with, women were so valuable as commodities that they were allowed to live in order to swell the numbers of the conquerors. A mother herself, the queen is shown as seeing in these aliens their potential for motherhood. This fact does not, however, awaken in her any feeling of identification or compassion; on the contrary, it is viewed only in terms of its exploitable value and, paradoxically, it is her lack of fellow feeling that effectively cuts off ours.

Deborah's series of projections come home at last. With tenderness, she has alighted upon an actual mother, only to discover her as the epitome of all that is hostile. Yet, if this particular example of metonymy, girls as "wombs," is the extreme of insult, it is also the highest praise. Deborah has consciously pruned this mother's language down to bare biology, thus investing the anonymous collectivity of the future mothers of Israel with mythological stature. It is they, and not the individual heroines of the action, all of whom are lacking in an essential tenderness, on whom depends the future.



In order to sublimate her natural feelings so as to include a nation, Deborah has had to lose out on personal warmth; has had, therefore, to focus upon Yael who, through her demonstration of the Bedouin gift of hospitality, has extended her motherliness to include the stranger, only to break the bond thus created and kill; has lingered with compassion upon the agony of Sisera's mother, the most conventionally maternal of all three, until, in turn, this mother's utter lack of sensitivity for the sufferings of other women provides the perfect pretext for Deborah's interjection, in her own voice and without a trace of irony, of where her national sympathies lie:

So perish all Thine enemies, O Lord. . . . (Judges 5:31).

The poignant vignette of a sorrowing mother that has been offered us lies utterly smashed; the principle that has been dominant throughout the narrative gives way to more destructive forces. Compassion having given out, and with it the poetic privilege of empathizing with alien points of view, the spotlight shifts from women behind the scenes, in the palace, in the tent, to the men taking up the forefront of the action. Even if there is no individual hero to shoulder the role of victor, the prophetess rejoices in being able to reassert the preponderance of an abstract male principle in her description of the Divine Triumph:

So perish all Thine enemies, O Lord,  
But they who love Him shall be as the  
Bridegroom marching forth in virile splendor. . . .<sup>20</sup>

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20. The actual translation of 5:31 reads: "But they who love Him shall be as the sun marching forth in virile splendor." However, in the Psalms, the sun is compared to "a groom marching forth from the bridal chamber," and I took the liberty of combining the two, again to emphasize the male Divine progress in terms of a wedding.

# *The Work of Bertha Pappenheim\**

RUTH RAPP DRESNER

## *Reminiscences*

IN THE MILIEU IN WHICH I GREW UP BERTHA Pappenheim was a household name. She was a charismatic personality and the founder and moving spirit of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* of Germany, and her fame had spread beyond her native land into other European countries. It is not easy, today, when debunking has become so popular a pastime, to convey the reverence, and even the ritual, that surrounded her memory. Perhaps one episode will help to convey the aura in which this very great woman was held, a woman who, strange to report, was until recently virtually unknown to the American Jewish community.

One of Miss Pappenheim's ablest volunteer workers, who shared her literary interests and was able to influence her own wealthy husband to donate generously to Miss Pappenheim's "good causes," was my paternal aunt, Mrs. Irene Darmstedter. When this aunt learned that I wanted to become a social worker and that I was interested in the Pappenheim contributions to German Jewish social work, she arranged to have me invited to the yearly gathering of the Pappenheim inner circle at the time of the *yahrzeit*. Ordinarily, this group would allow no outsiders to attend, lest they tarnish the spirit of the occasion. Their exclusivity went to such a point that, for example, they denied an invitation to Dora Edinger, who was interested in writing about their mentor (and who did, in fact, publish a volume about her). It took the considerable influence of my aunt and of my maternal grandmother, Mrs. Therese Freimann, both of whom were members of this elite group, in addition to my own solemn promise that I would divulge to no one my presence at the 1953 *yahrzeit* gathering.

The meeting took place in New York City in the richly decorated hotel apartment of Clem Kramer, one of the last of the "Salon Jewesses," a patron of the arts, and typical of the well-to-do Jewish women whom Bertha Pappenheim had interested in *Frauenarbeit* or women's social service. Among those present whom I remember were Helene Krämer, a devoted baby nurse, who had worked, near Frankfurt, at *Isenburg*, the home for Jewish unwed mothers founded and directed by Miss Pappenheim, members of the editorial staff of the excellent journal published

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\* This paper is a review-essay of: *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany. The Campaigns of the "Jüdischer Frauenbund," 1904-1938.* By MARION A. KAPLAN. Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1979. viii + 239 pp.

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RUTH RAPP DRESNER is currently working as a marriage counselor and as consultant to a special education program for behavior-disordered children in Illinois.

by the movement, as well as Mrs. O. Schoenewald, its last president. Some of the women who attended, who had worked in the *Mädchenklub* (girls' club) or the other organizations founded by Bertha Pappenheim to improve the position of Jewish women in Germany, had already begun to offer similar service in the New York German Jewish community. They sat around a table covered with an exquisite lace cloth and set with fine china. They had tea and fancy pastries and conversation, just as they had done in the home of Bertha Pappenheim, and each one brought items of lace or beaded jewelry which she had made for them. For one short hour we were transported back to the Frankfurt of the 1920s and were able to recapture something of what Miss Pappenheim meant to these women.

Towards the beginning of the meeting they called to mind a number of the leading figures of the group who had been killed by Hitler and several who were too old, sick or distant to attend. My aunt read aloud selections from Bertha Pappenheim's writings. My grandmother, who had been too self-motivated to work under the direction of Miss Pappenheim — it would be more accurate to say that the two women worked side by side in Frankfurt — had transferred the idea of *Frauenarbeit* to New York when she migrated in 1939. Her contribution to the meeting was specific. She reminded the group of the problems existing among German Jewish immigrant families in New York, and she drafted the members to work for such agencies as the Blue Card and the Self Help Organization, both of which she helped to found and which still exist today. The group concurred that while both Miss Pappenheim and my grandmother were energetic, charming and innovative, they were likewise strict. It is interesting to note that the epitaph which Bertha Pappenheim wrote for herself was — "She was very strict."

In 1954, Ernest Jones, in his biography of Sigmund Freud, revealed for the first time the startling news that Anna O., the celebrated patient about whom Freud had written and through whom he developed the cathartic method, one of the central notions on which modern psychoanalysis was based, was none other than B.P., Bertha Pappenheim! This secret had been kept from even her closest associates who, at first, were hesitant to speak of it. If they explained her illness and her failure to marry, they sometimes did so in terms of their own outlook. Thus, my grandmother, a pious woman, descended from a long line of distinguished rabbis, explained to me that Bertha Pappenheim's nervous breakdown was caused by her "disappointment in love with a Rabbi." Clem Kramer, on the other hand, the "Salon Jewess" whose romantic fantasies were somewhat different from those of my grandmother, preferred to believe that the illness followed "disappointment in love with a Prussian army officer!" Those of Bertha Pappenheim's close workers who lived long enough to see the play written about her, with the description of her pathological relationship to her father, or writings such as that of Lucy Freeman, discredited them as cheap sensationalism.

My family and German Jewish friends knew Bertha Pappenheim in

various ways. Some knew her as a social worker, others as a feminist, still others as a person prejudiced against Eastern European Jews, or against Zionism, or as a troublesome agitator whose exposés of Jewish shortcomings provided grist for Nazi anti-Semitism. Some disliked her. Most admired her. Some knew her personally. But no one was ignorant of her name.

### *Historical Perspective*

This leads to a question. How is it possible that this seminal figure in social work and feminism, fighter against white slavery, author and translator of important Jewish works, founder of a Jewish women's organization to which one out of every ten German Jewish women belonged, bold creator of important institutions, and founder and principal writer for a Jewish women's periodical equalled in quality by very few in this country, was virtually unknown to American Jews before Ernest Jones revealed her as Anna O.?

It is true that Bertha Pappenheim participated in the international women's congresses called by the general as well as the Jewish communities. She had met and consulted with such major personalities as Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, and Rebekah Kohut, a leader of the American Council of Jewish Women. Mrs. Louis Ginsberg, prominent in the Women's League for Conservative Judaism and a resident of Frankfurt in her early years, spoke to me of Bertha Pappenheim on several occasions. Yet her name is hardly mentioned in any historical account of twentieth century Jewry written in English before 1950, nor was her work even used as a model by the widely expanding network of Jewish social service organizations or by national synagogue women's groups who could have learned so much from her accomplishments. It is true that Miss Pappenheim had failings. She did not fully understand the importance of Zionism and Youth Aliyah. She may have overreacted to the involvement of Eastern European Jews in prostitution and the white slave trade. However, her enrichment of modern Judaism through her writings, her work in the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* to improve the position of the Jewish woman, her amalgamation of Jewish tradition with social changes and her personal drive far outweigh these shortcomings. Indeed, some would argue that the only Jewish women comparable to her in the twentieth century were Henrietta Szold, Golda Meir and perhaps Sarah Schnirer, the founder of the Beth Jacob Schools in Eastern Europe.

### *Impressive Contribution*

Marion A. Kaplan, author of *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany. The Campaigns of the "Jüdischer Frauenbund," 1904-1938*, makes a significant contribution to an understanding of B.P. and her work.

Through extensive research, as evidenced by her informative footnotes, Kaplan alludes to the distorted fashion in which some writers have

characterized twentieth century German Jews. They feel that German Jews, as a body, failed to meet the challenge of "the emancipation," the breakdown of the ghetto walls and the acceptance of Jews into German culture. They are judged on the basis of the notoriety of those who assimilated to the point where they were hardly recognizable as Jews. German Judaism is understood to be the Judaism brought to America by the early founders of Reform Judaism, when, in fact, the Reformers were forced to transfer their radical beliefs to the United States because they were too extreme for German Jewry. Based on the descriptions of the failure of Judaism in twentieth century Germany, one can understand why the religious contributions of the Jews of pre-Nazi and Nazi Germany are often discredited or ignored.

Kaplan attempts to correct history in pointing out that there was a "silent majority" (p. 19) of German Jews who were attached to Jewish tradition and, at the same time, availed themselves of German culture and became involved in social change. She uses her study of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* as a prime example. Through her analysis of this movement and its contribution to feminism, Marion Kaplan has filled a gap in Jewish history and has provided an example of social consciousness rooted in Jewish religious tradition which had concrete and practical applications.

Kaplan describes the life of B.P. as an illustration of the place of women in the late nineteenth century. She summarizes the difficult time Miss Pappenheim had in finding emotional equilibrium and describes the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* as a product of B.P.'s turbulent experiences and leadership abilities. She illustrates how B.P.'s anger over male dominance made her forge unconventional channels through which to further women's rights and welfare and how B.P. was influenced by the German feminist movement, some of whose leaders were Jewish but whose Judaism was not expressed in their work. B.P. felt the need for a Jewish feminist movement that would amalgamate the goals of the German feminist movement with the moral and religious beliefs of Judaism, witness the stress laid upon the religious dimension in the publications of the *J.F.B.* or the fact that all of their institutions observed the Sabbath and dietary laws.

Even though Mrs. Kaplan does not make it an implicit part of her book to contrast the feminism of today with that of B.P.'s time, she makes several relevant observations. It was a source of pain, not of pride, to B.P. that she was never married or a mother. Today, B.P. would say that being a woman is more than having a career. She placed marriage and motherhood above and before *Frauenarbeit*, and she understood the delicate balance between woman's position in the family and in her employment. She saw the uniqueness of the sexes as a part of God's order of creation and did not believe that the roles of husband and wife were interchangeable in the home. However, she battled fiercely for equal opportunities for women in the community and in their work. She felt that feminism could enhance Judaism but not replace it. Although she struggled all her

life with the male rabbinic leadership for improvements in women's religious role, she never wanted to usurp the rabbi's position nor to discard her religion because it was male-dominated.

Marion Kaplan refers briefly to B.P.'s literary contributions. She mentions several of her plays and stories relating to her feminist strivings and her translation of the diary of her ancestor, *Glückel von Hameln*. In addition, B.P. undertook the more scholarly rendition into German of two classics of Jewish folk literature — *The Tzenah u-Re'ena* and *The Ma'ase Buch* — to which leading scholars such as Ismar Elbogen, Leo Baeck and the young Abraham Heschel lent their support and approval. The long bibliography of B.P.'s writings provides further evidence of her talents and boundless energy. The more outstanding of these works are a booklet of women's prayers in poetic form, an extensive journal of her work in combating white slave trade, called *Sisyphus Arbeit*, and her regular articles in the journal of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund*, which was the chief organ through which its members were educated to the concerns and philosophy of the organization. A study of this outstanding journal, *Die Blätter des Jüdischen Frauenbundes für Frauenarbeit und Frauenbewegung*, would provide additional documentation of the contribution of twentieth century German Jewish women who have remained "hidden from history" for too long.

Having described the charismatic personality of Bertha Pappenheim, Kaplan devotes a major portion of her book to a study of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund*, focussing upon the convergent spheres of German, Jewish and women's history.

The general German women's movement was already in existence in 1904 when the *J.F.B.* was founded. To motivate Jewish women to become actively involved it was necessary to show them that they were in double jeopardy — discriminated against both as women and as Jews. Therefore, they concerned themselves with social as well as religious issues. The emergence of *J.F.B.* paralleled not only the German women's group but similar Jewish women's organizations in England and America (e.g., the National Council of Jewish Women). From 1904 to 1920 the *J.F.B.* grew to 430 affiliated groups in Germany, totalling 50,000 members. Percentally, the membership in *J.F.B.* was far greater than that of the secular women's organizations in Germany. Nor was quality sacrificed in growth.

Kaplan describes three main campaigns of the *J.F.B.* which related to feminism. The first of these was *the struggle against the white slave trade*, an attempt to relieve the plight of abused women and to improve the general conditions of women. The author presents impressive statistics from *Jüdischer Frauenbund* sources to show the extent to which both Jewish men and women were involved in prostitution and white slave trade, primarily in Eastern Europe and South America. B.P. referred to this aspect of her work in the *J.F.B.* as the "Work of Sisyphus" because, like the mythical Sisyphus, she was set back in her work by the progress she made. In the 1920s, when B.P. returned from her fact-finding trips to the East and



presented the results of her research, she was discredited by the religious leaders of the Eastern European communities from which, it appeared, the problems stemmed, as well as those from the West. Neither did she receive much support from *J.F.B.* members who did not want to sully themselves with such socially repugnant matters. She lived to see the Nazis use her exposé of the Jewish white slave trade as vicious anti-Semitic propaganda. To demonstrate how the *J.F.B.* synthesized German culture and social situations with their religious beliefs, Kaplan shows that, as feminists, the *J.F.B.*, along with general women's group, fought for the abolition and the police regulation of brothels and saw white slave trade as a symbol of the degradation of women and a proof of society's double standards. The *J.F.B.* likewise looked to the Jewish ramification of the problem. Aside from demonstrating statistically that Jews played a prominent role in this "business," B.P. showed how the Jewish communities' inadequate legal protection of women led white slave traffickers to prey upon a number of helpless *agunot* and women whose husbands refused to give them a *get* (a Jewish divorce). B.P. also claimed that some Jewish unmarried women, who were homeless, extremely poor, had little education and could find no work, felt forced to become prostitutes. The solution which the *J.F.B.* proposed was to found shelters, clubs and classes to protect girls living away from home, and to help them with employment by offering a legitimate way of making a living. They reinstituted the ancient Jewish custom of clothing the poor and dowering brides to encourage early marriages in the hope of eliminating Jewish men's needs to use prostitutes and to increase the Jewish birth rate.

The author points out that while the *J.F.B.* did not solve the problems of prostitution and white slave trade, concern with the issue itself served broader feminist goals, namely, to help elevate the legal, social, and economic status of women.

The second campaign of the *J.F.B.*, which Kaplan deals with in detail, was the pursuit of *women's equality* with men in Jewish communal affairs. To evaluate this campaign one must remember that German Jews were, by German law, members of the *Gemeinde*, a highly structured community that was supported by government taxes and which administered the cultural program, religious life and education and social welfare of its members. The *J.F.B.* fought to penetrate the male domination of the *Gemeinde*, by educating its members to Jewish political and religious issues, by encouraging women to work as volunteers in Jewish community social agencies and by propagandizing, petitioning and challenging male dominated organizations.

This was a very difficult task for *J.F.B.* The women were often discouraged by the men and religious leaders of their communities but they banded together in national and international women's organizations to improve their self image and to gain strength. Characteristically, the members of *J.F.B.* fought their battle within religious constraints and never looked toward feminist goals that would make them separate them-

selves from, or repudiate, the religious community. Unfortunately, women were not limited to stay within the *Gemeinde* only out of religious conviction; once Hitler came to power the policies of the German government made Jewish women unwelcome in feminist endeavors outside of the Jewish community. As more and more Jewish men were forced to emigrate or were deported, women gained the control that they always wanted. At this tragic point in history, what women had learned from *J.F.B.* stood them in good stead. In this second campaign the *J.F.B.* was a pioneer for similar organizations in other countries.

The third campaign of the *J.F.B.* was to provide *career-training* for women. In feminist tradition, the *J.F.B.* wanted careers for women to afford them independence, personal enrichment and the ability to penetrate the male-dominated world. In social work tradition, the *J.F.B.* recognized the need for career-training because of the social, political and economic changes that were taking place in Germany at the time. As always, the *J.F.B.* did not take a radical stand. German feminists claimed that it was women's right to work and they made this a central issue. Jewish feminists did not demand for themselves the right to work outside of the home, but, out of concern for the younger generation and out of an awareness of the need, they urged Jewish families to educate all of their girls, especially towards a career.

In order not to antagonize men unduly, the *J.F.B.* started career training in areas that were considered "women's work," such as housekeeping and social service. The *J.F.B.* was instrumental in training girls as professional homemakers, baby nurses, kindergarten teachers and social workers. As was true of everything the *J.F.B.* did, Judaism was an integral part of the program, while the teachers and social workers were trained in holiday observances and Jewish family traditions.

Kaplan seems to have some ambivalence about this third campaign. She indicates that the *J.F.B.*'s emphasis on homemaking careers may have been self-serving, that German Jewish middle class women, who had emancipated themselves from housework and who could no longer hire Christian domestics, may have been looking for a new labor supply. She further insinuates that the *J.F.B.*'s hesitance in broader career training failed to enable women to branch out into more meaningful and prestigious careers. *J.F.B.* tried to upgrade the position of women in the home by raising the standards of the housekeeping profession. Again Kaplan suspects that this was a banality, since most women working in *J.F.B.* had delegated their housework to others and felt it was too menial for them.

### *Conclusion*

Even though the three campaigns did not eradicate the problems that they were to combat, they helped to serve wider feminist goals and to articulate a program of social and political consciousness rooted in Jewish tradition. Mrs. Kaplan's book is a contribution to "women's literature"

and, in the spirit of B.P., promotes the cause of women. What is most captivating, however, is the author's description of the tensions between, and the synthesis of, the social-political issues and the perspective of Judaism.

Jewish psychiatrists, social-workers and feminists have considerable cause for interest in the work of Bertha Pappenheim.

Psychiatrists, familiar with Freud's description of Anna O., might find it illuminating to clarify in greater depth how B.P. was able to overcome her early illness and develop into the petulant and creative woman that she became, as well as to understand the respective roles which her emotional illness, her feminist tendency and her faith in Judaism played in the emergence of her adult personality.

Social-workers have been grappling with the problem of "What is Jewish about Jewish social agencies?" Though the *J.F.B.* emerged during a period when social work as we know it today was in its infancy, an examination of its achievements from the point of view of Jewish social agencies seems long overdue. For example, what was the substance of the arguments presented in their journal and in other publications? What was the typical program of the *Mädchenklub*; how did they seek to rehabilitate the Jewish unwed mother at *Isenburg*; why did they mail reminders to Jewish soldiers in the German army in the First World War to "remain holy!"? In short, what was the theory and the content of their social work?<sup>1</sup>

Finally, feminists, and Jewish women's organizations today function in a climate considerably different from Germany in the 20s. The questions that they face, however, are the same. For some it is: what does my being a woman mean? For others: what does my being a Jewish woman mean? The *J.F.B.*, while not avoiding the broad spectrum of women's problems, was impressive in terms of its exploration of the relevance of Judaism in search of a modern idiom. Women's organizations may be impressed by the dignity, the seriousness, the sophistication and the courage with which B.P. and the *J.F.B.* faced issues and sought to carry out their programs. Feminists should pay attention to their struggle for a Jewish understanding of the problems confronting them.

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1. See Ruth R. Dresner, "*Bertha Pappenheim – The Contribution of a German Jewish Pioneer Social Reformer to Social Work: 1859–1936*," (Master's dissertation, Fordham University, 1954).

# *Female Humanity: American Jewish Women Writers Speak Out*

MARC LEE RAPHAEL

... I was sunk deep into my own guilt ... [I]f I stuck by Brian ... I'd go crazy, or at the very least give up most of my identity. But if I left him ... I was abandoning him — just when he needed help the most. In a sense, I was a traitor. It had come down to a choice between me or him, and I chose me. My guilt about this haunts me still. Somewhere deep inside my head ... is some glorious image of the ideal woman, a kind of Jewish Griselda. She is Ruth and Esther and Jesus and Mary rolled into one. She always turns the other cheek. She is a vehicle, a vessel, with no needs or desires of her own. When her husband beats her, she understands him. When he is sick, she nurses him. When the children are sick, she nurses them. She cooks, keeps house, runs the store, keeps the books, listens to everyone's problems, visits the cemetery, weeds the graves, plants the garden, scrubs the floor. ... She is capable of absolutely everything except self-preservation. And secretly, I am always ashamed of myself for not being her. A good woman would have given her life to the care and feeding of her husband's madness. I was not a good woman. I had too many other things to do.

Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying*

ERICA JONG'S HEROINE ISADORA IN *FEAR OF FLYING* has considerable insight into the ultimate source of her guilt: she sees its origins in Biblical archetypes of self-sacrifice which, traditionally, have served as models for fictional portrayals of "good" women. Under the pressure of changing images of women in our society, such literary portrayals have begun to change rapidly, particularly in the fiction written by Jewish women in America in our century. As Jewish women writers — from Anzia Yezierska to Lois Gould, Rona Jaffe, Erica Jong and a dozen others — struggle to present crucial aspects of Jewish women's lives which, for centuries, have gone virtually unrecorded, they are depicting women as they are, not as society wishes them to be. Feminism and technology have combined to create American Jewish heroines with their own unconquerable and even indefinable power and who, as single women, widows, and divorcees, often appear more "together" than those who are married, and who seek erotic initiative and a depth of sexual love, not in order to submit themselves as objects, but in order to exercise their full range of faculties as subject, to become whole.

Anzia Yezierska (1885–1970), alone among immigrant Jewish women, produced a significant body of thinly-disguised autobiographical

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MARC LEE RAPHAEL is associate professor of history at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

literature about the urban immigrant experience and especially about the problems and exploitations of the first generation immigrant woman. The American dream, which had been so touchingly yet uncritically praised and celebrated by Mary Antin in *The Promised Land*, turns into a nightmare for Yeziarska's women who are robbed of health, youth, dignity, and ideals.

Her first book, *Hungry Hearts*,<sup>1</sup> contains ten stories of immigrant life in the New York ghetto — one of which ("The Fat of the Land") was selected by Edward J. O'Brien as the best piece of imaginative literature of the year 1919. It was a modest success, but became an enormous one when Samuel Goldwyn bought the rights to it for \$10,000 and made it into a movie. Filled with enormous vitality, passion, energy, and determination, the heroine, Shenah Pessah, pursues her savage desire for feminine identity against male (and, it appears, America's) coldness, indifference, and emotional repression. Again, in *Children of Loneliness*,<sup>2</sup> ten more stories of hunger and loneliness, similar heroines emerge: passionate, emotional, unrestrained, always on the verge of hysteria as they try to give voice to their aspirations.

In Yeziarska's first novel, *Salome of the Tenements*,<sup>3</sup> the suppressed aspirations of the Russian Jewish immigrant woman burst into flames in Sonya Vrunsky. With a vivid and colorful style, an honesty, and a consistent delicacy, Yeziarska adumbrates again the conflict between Jewish immigrant cultural richness and vitality, and American (represented by a tall, Anglo-Saxon male) control, repression, and discipline, for Sonya sorrows that Americanization ultimately means a loss of community, nourishment, freedom, and of creative energy. Sonya is "fire, sunshine and desire," while the "cold Anglo-Saxons" have been "brought up for generations in the belief that any display of emotion is vulgar" and one of them, the man she idolizes and loves, finally tells her "emotion — I'm tired of it." So, too, in Yeziarska's *All I Could Never Be*,<sup>4</sup> where Fanya Ivanowna and Professor Henry Scott once more represent the struggle between feminine abandon ("I want life in all its terribleness, in all its suffering, but not safety") and male rationality and control ("Reason — it's always reason with you!"). Fanya, like Sonya, recognizes "the outrageous egotism of wanting to use a man's life for woman's happiness."

With *Bread Givers*,<sup>5</sup> Yeziarska takes us inside the mind and heart of a ten year old girl in much the same way as Henry Roth does with young David Schearl in *Call It Sleep*. Sara Smolinsky watches the submissive pride

1. Anzia Yeziarska, *Hungry Hearts* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1920).

2. Anzia Yeziarska, *Children of Loneliness* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1923).

3. Anzia Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922). "Salome" is a misnomer, for Sonya may be likened to many classic figures, but never to Salome; the traditional Salome was a cat's paw in the hand of Herodias, while Sonya is a "soul consumed with hunger for heights beyond reach."

4. Anzia Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be* (New York: Brewer, Warren and Putnam, 1932).

5. Anzia Yeziarska, *Bread Givers* (New York: Doubleday, 1925).

of her mother, and as she observes her sisters, one by one crushed by their father's tyrannical and clumsy manipulation of their lives and his alienation of their lovers in order to match them with his choice of husbands for them, she determines to revolt against limited roles and excessive circumscription — the “old world of female subservience.” She attributes these limitations to the psychological development of immigrant Jewish women as it occurs in the patriarchal family — where the mother is the primary nurturer and the father the symbol of authority. This argument will be echoed by two more generations of women who attempt to demonstrate that the psychological differences this arrangement causes are reinforced by the inability of most men — because of the patriarchal family structure — to be nurturers.

Like Fanya and Sonya, Sara at first feels that her only escape is through a male, but eventually she finds it in herself. This triumph of independence and self-worth is, alas, not without tremendous guilt; she must completely repudiate her father's values, and “the generations who made my father,” in order to assert herself as a woman.<sup>6</sup> Yeziarska wrestles continuously with this dilemma, and her ambivalence is highlighted by the ending of *All I Could Never Be*, written five years after *Bread Givers*. In her final novel, and her last writing for nearly two decades, “the mere thought of [Fanya's] father is ground under [Fanya's] feet, a sky over [Fanya's] head,” and provides Fanya with “something real and abiding — roots to hold you, soil in which to grow.” This novel foreshadows Yeziarska's realization in her autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*,<sup>7</sup> “that the glimpses of truth I reached for everywhere were in myself.” This female humanity — the act of rebellion and the beginnings of self-affirmation — is a theme which will occupy the second generation and dominate post-World War II Jewish women's literature.

Three American Jewish writers, Tess Slesinger, Tillie Olsen, and Grace Paley, all of them daughters of immigrant parents, further delineate and expand the themes of Yeziarska's stories and novels.

Tess Slesinger (1905–1944) wrote twenty-one short stories, one novel (*The Unpossessed*),<sup>8</sup> and eight screenplays (including *The Good Earth* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*) before her untimely death in 1944. She calls her generation — a group of younger, New York, mostly Jewish, leftist intellectuals — “the unpossessed,” and though Bruno Leonard, a neurotic, brilliant Jewish professor has center stage, the relationship between the young married couple, Margaret and Miles Flinders, provides Slesinger with abundant space to comment upon marriage, children, sex, and especially women from a strongly feminist perspective.

She is particularly aware of sexual politics — exploring the relationship between the sexes as a power struggle and revealing their disturbed

6. For a differing interpretation of *Bread Givers*, see Alice Kessler Harris' “Introduction” to the 1975 Persea Books edition.

7. Anzia Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (New York: Scribner's, 1950).

8. Tess Slesinger, *The Unpossessed* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934).



balance. The couple are, initially, breaking their hearts because they do not have nerve enough to have a baby, though Miles views childbirth as a sell-out to capitalist society. Margaret's conception and abortion reveal her greater strength and tougher fiber, and cause immense resentment in her husband, who is conscious of being defeated as a man who "could have made her a woman." She, on the other hand, overcomes her subservience to him, and rejects the notion that "a woman was only so great as the monument of her man."<sup>9</sup>

Tillie Olsen (b. 1913) is the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants who raised her in Marxist households in Wyoming and Nebraska. From her first publication, a poem in *The Partisan* which grew out of one women's oppression, to her most recent book (*Silences*), she brings a woman's eye and, eventually, a mother's experiences to her most fully drawn characters — women.

*Yonnondio: from the Thirties*<sup>10</sup> was written between 1932 and 1937, but not published until recently. The Holbrooks, an archetypal poor family of American fiction, are drawn with special intensity and poetry, and their story is told mainly through the consciousness of their daughter, Maizie, whose child's senses sharply register the sights, sounds, and smells of poverty. Anna Holbrook, a Jew, is highly conscious of memories of a grandmother "bending in such a twilight over lit candles chanting in an unknown tongue, white bread on the table over a shining white tablecloth and red wine." Although without material success (she lives in a hut at the beginning and end), she develops a deep "understanding" of life and love which she is able to impart to Maizie. This understanding, of "happiness and fairness and selfness," is the result of Anna's coming to terms with herself and her life, evaluating it, and changing it sufficiently to transmit this insight to others.

The pressures of full-time work and raising four children left Olsen with insufficient time to sustain a novel, but, twenty years after *Yonnondio*, she did write a few short stories. "I Stand Here Ironing"<sup>11</sup> (written in 1953 and covering less than one hour in a mother's thoughts) looks back over a life where there has been no "time to remember, to sift, to weigh, to estimate, to total." Olsen here perceives acutely and gives form vividly to the meaning of her narrator's motherhood, that "total" which the mother has no time to sum up and which the author once called "common female realities." It is the story of a woman comprehending herself and her own behavior (as in her story "Oh Yes"),<sup>12</sup> especially in response to others (her daughter) and to the past, and gaining an insight and a confidence which she can share.

9. On Tess Slesinger, see Lionel Trilling, "Young in the Thirties," *Commentary*, 41 (May, 1966): 43-51 and Stanley Yedwab, "The Jew as Portrayed in American Jewish Novels of the 1930s," Rabbinic Thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1959.

10. Tillie Olsen, *Yonnondio: from the Thirties* (New York: Delacorte, 1974).

11. Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing," in *Tell Me a Riddle* (New York: Dell, 1961), pp. 1-12.

12. Tillie Olsen, "Oh Yes," *Op. cit.*, pp. 39-62.

"Tell Me a Riddle,"<sup>13</sup> another story from the 1950s and also about the "common female realities," was awarded the O. Henry prize for the best short story of 1961. It demonstrates Olsen's masterful familiarity with Jewish immigrant speech patterns and culture, the rhythms of Yiddishized English, and the reverberations of a long complex history of "shlepping" across the country. The story moves from the outward eccentricities of Eva, who is dying, to the glowing core of her being, anchored as it is in her own experiences, and the discovery of the meaning beneath and within her life and death.

As we travel back across her forty-seven years of marriage, we learn that as a mother and a grandmother she "had had to manage" poverty and five children while her husband "never scraped a carrot or knew a dish towel sops," and, at last, she desperately resolves "never again to be forced to move to the rhythm of others." It is a story about a woman's feverish attempts to establish a relationship of intimacy and the dilemma of explaining it to a man; it is about aging and dying immigrant Jews, lost in an America they neither made nor understand, pitted against their native-born, prosperous, troubled children; it is about the perception of loss and forgetting and, finally, one woman's extraordinarily vivid remembering.

Like Tillie Olsen, who writes with great compassion about women — the very poor who have been crushed, over and over, by the circumstances of life and have no means to buy or invent lies about their situations, — Grace Paley (b. 1922), the daughter of immigrants, writes mostly about "ordinary" people. Her first collection, *The Little Disturbances of Man*,<sup>14</sup> revolves largely around herself, her children, her parents, her ex-husband and her friends, and celebrates, against Jewish backgrounds, the simple virtues of trust, generosity, and compassion, of what she has called "mutual aid and concern." She is a marvelous story-teller, and she aptly described her own work when she once spoke of "the great oral tradition that women have of handing down stories from grandma to granddaughter and speaking together wherever they are."<sup>15</sup>

Her second collection, *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*,<sup>16</sup> is filled with Jewish women who have "crummy days and crummy guys," lives filled with psychic isolation, especially between women and men, children and parents. "Faith in the Afternoon," for example, recounts the thoughts and conversations of a long afternoon that a woman spends with her mother, father, and her mother's friend in a Jewish old-age home. Despite the remembrances of a lifetime, terrible boredom and despair permeate the pages. Like the other stories, it is a tale of feminine woe, and this theme of "kvetch, kvetch" will dominate the fiction of the third generation of American Jewish women writers.

13. Tillie Olsen, "Tell Me a Riddle," *Op. cit.*, pp. 63–116.

14. Grace Paley, *The Little Disturbances of Man* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1959).

15. "A Symposium on Fiction," *Shenandoah*, 27:2 (Winter, 1976): 29 and 31.

16. Grace Paley, *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974).

This large and talented group have delineated, generally, the oppressive aspects of growing up as a white, middle-class female in America and, specifically, of middle-class Jewish girlhood and womanhood. There is the entire litany of feminist complaints — parents telling daughters they are beautiful, boys fumbling at skirts, sexism everywhere in society as patriarchal institutional mechanisms oppress women, male superiority, female emptiness and boredom, and husbands who cannot cope with female humanity — and while not unique to, these complaints are bound up with, being a well-educated, food-fixated, exceptionally witty, Jewishly suffused, affluent Jewish woman in America.<sup>17</sup>

*The Jewish Princess.* During the late 1950s and the 1960s, a spate of novels, written by Jewish men, examined and then ridiculed or denigrated the “Jewish Mother.” Throughout the 1970s this stereotype was replaced by that of the “Jewish Princess,” a concept developed twenty years earlier by Herman Wouk in *Marjorie Morningstar* and Philip Roth in *Goodbye Columbus* and greatly expanded afterwards.

The Jewish Princess exists as a materialistic (“the wife in red harlequin glasses who planted a whole flower bed of tiny plastic orchids around her sunken bathtub on Long Island”), spoiled (“mothers set out to find the proper dwelling for the two princess-daughters”), self-centered figure who is her parents’ pride and joy (“Why, Sasha, you’re the prettiest girl in your class”) and her husband’s measure of success; and most Jewish women novelists (as well as their male counterparts) hold her up to ridicule.

Beauty and marriage are the two most derided aspects of the Jewish Princess motif in third generation novels. Many of the novelists respond, as does Alix Kates Shulman in her *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*,<sup>18</sup> to the emphasis from childhood on beauty. “By the third grade,” Sasha Davis recalls, “with every other girl in Baybury Heights, I came to realize that there was only one thing worth bothering about: becoming beautiful.” Her mother hammered home this message constantly; yet “it seemed as impossible for me [Sasha] to know how I looked as it was important.” Alison Lowen, heiress to the fortune of one-time Indianapolis rag peddler, Amos Lowen, in Lois Gould’s *Necessary Objects*,<sup>19</sup> says of her daughter Jill: “Why not a great beauty? If a child has a chance to be — perfect? As beautiful as she can — isn’t that what it’s all about?” This need to feel preoccupied with what Betty Friedan calls “female economics — beauty

17. Many of the themes that we are discussing are also common to non-Jewish women’s literature; on well-educated, well-married, attractive, intelligent, desirable WASP women in literature, see Dolores Barracano Schmidt, “The Great American Bitch,” *College English*, 32, 8 (May, 1971): 900–905; for “Mom” and “Momism” in Philip Wylie, where “Mom” is a self-centered, completely useless creature with incredible stupidity, see his chapter on “Common Women” in *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934). See also Harold Schechter, “Kali on Main Street: The Rise of the Terrible Mother in America,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 7 (Fall, 1973): 251–263.

18. Alix Kates Shulman, *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

19. Lois Gould, *Necessary Objects* (New York: Random House, 1972).

and physical appearance," is widely viewed by these novelists as one of the most oppressive aspects of growing up middle-class and Jewish. Julie Messenger, in Lois Gould's *Such Good Friends*,<sup>20</sup> succinctly sums it up: "Beautiful; oh, why can't I be?"

In addition to mocking the internalizing, by Jewish women, of the Jewish male idea of femininity — that the most important attribute for a woman in attracting and holding a Jewish man is beauty — the heroines of these novels are in revolt against the notion that, if unmated, a Jewish woman is incomplete. In Gail Parent's *Sheila Levine is Dead and Living in New York*,<sup>21</sup> Sheila extends this predicament to its limits: Comically, "All our cemetery plots are double, Miss," and more seriously, "I am killing myself because I wanted to get married and my mother wanted me to get married and I never did get married, and I'm tired of the embarrassment of it all." Sheila's conditioning, presented without any subtlety, is constant: "What do you want to be when you grow up, Sheila?" "I want to be a wife and a mommy." "Good girl." Or, on other occasions: "It will be the greatest day of my life when I dance at your wedding" — "If only I should live to see my children married, I would die a happy woman" — "Sheila, Darling, It's better to find someone while you're in school. Once you get out, it gets harder and harder." Audrey Mortimer's mother, in Susan Lukas' *Stereopticon*,<sup>22</sup> has similar advice: "You'll have a family of your own, and a wonderful husband just like daddy, and he'll take care of you just like daddy takes care of me."

Sometimes, these themes of beauty and marriage merge in intriguing ways. In *Final Analysis*,<sup>23</sup> Lois Gould's heroine wonders how a woman who is convinced that she looks bad and talks poorly, a woman with exceptionally low self-esteem, can win the love of a psychoanalyst. By being a beautiful, sweet, admiring, sexy Jewish Princess, she reasons; to stop hating herself she merely needs to have all the things she was told she should have. And the price? Very high — for when she is married, the princess is neglected, mistreated, and humiliated. Norma Rosen, in *Joy to Levine*,<sup>24</sup> reacts more comically, but perhaps more trenchantly, to the stereotype by having Levine (ugly, frail, nearsighted and Jewish) fall in love with Theresa (fat, inarticulate, and Jewish). Her fatness is, for him, a constant dream of "rolling hills, endless meadows, richness, ease and peace." Theresa, the antithesis of the Princess, becomes a warm and understanding woman, and Levine plies her with sweets lest she become slim and reveal her "beauty" to less timid suitors.

*The Jewish Mother.* This character is ubiquitous in third generation Jewish women's fiction, and she is not only overprotective and smothering, but usually the bane of her children's existence. What was seen quite

20. Lois Gould, *Such Good Friends* (New York: Random House, 1970).

21. Gail Parent, *Sheila Levine is Dead and Living in New York* (New York: Putnam, 1972).

22. Susan Lukas, *Stereopticon* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975).

23. Lois Gould, *Final Analysis* (New York: Random House, 1974).

24. Norma Rosen, *Joy to Levine* (New York: Knopf, 1962).

often by earlier generations of Jewish writers as respect and love, as well as responsibility for their children's intellectual success and general achievements, is now viewed as suffocation. She is condemned now by her daughters: for thwarting them, repressing them, raising them for selfish purposes, refusing to let go, and dominating their emotional lives. And her "profession" — motherhood — is held in low esteem.

She is the one who, for Lois Gould's women, "Made Her What She is Today;" or for those of Rona Jaffe and Sue Kaufman, who "Kept Her From Being What She Could Have Been;" and, most often, she is like Barbara's mother in Louise Rose's *The Launching of Barbara Fabrikant*.<sup>25</sup> "Barbara, your hair! Your face!" Listen to Julie Messinger's mom in *Such Good Friends*, as Julie's husband lies dying in the hospital:

Julie darling, I don't really understand how you can come to the hospital looking like that. People are going to be coming to see you — by the way, I'm having a basket of fruit and nuts sent up to you from Schrafft's, you'll want to have something for people to nibble on, won't you, but couldn't you just go home and change out of that suit? . . . And I wish you'd wear darker lipstick with your hair that way.

The bourgeois values of the Jewish Mother are constantly mocked:

Neither one of us [Julie Messinger and her sister] had inflicted so much as an abortion on the family, let alone a divorce. We'd both graduated from decent colleges, landed decent-looking husbands, had decent-looking children [and] a decent mink that our husbands had managed to provide before they were forty.

So is Sheila Levine's mother who, despite the fact that if her fat daughter "stopped eating for one day you could feed all the starving people in India," bellows: "Are you sure you eat enough?" The Jewish Mother, almost without exception,<sup>26</sup> is most like Emma Sohler's with "her monumental faults — her coldness, her obnoxious snobbishness and bigotry, her disregard for privacy."

*Jewish Men*. Either they are completely absent, as in Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*<sup>27</sup> where there are no male characters with any individual identities, or they are all splendidly awful, as in Susan Schaeffer's *Falling*.<sup>28</sup> At their best, which is disgusting, they are husbands who view their wives as "equals," that is, women not free to develop their own tastes and attitudes but competent and worthy of sharing those of their husbands.

As if in response to Virginia Woolf's observation that the chief source of patriarchal power consists in defining half of the human race as inferior,<sup>29</sup> these Jewish women novelists create a universe of inferior

25. Louise Rose, *The Launching of Barbara Fabrikant* (New York: McKay, 1974).

26. One exception is Lila Beneker in Violet Weingarten's *Mrs. Beneker*. See Weingarten's comments on this in Frances A. Koestler, "A Modern Image at Last," *National Jewish Monthly*, 82, 8 (April, 1968): 24.

27. Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

28. Susan Schaeffer, *Falling* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1973).

29. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1957).

males. They seem to be taking to heart Simone de Beauvoir's argument in *The Second Sex* that since men codified society and decreed that women are inferior, women can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superiority.<sup>30</sup> Harold Sohler, in *Falling Bodies*, is incredibly insensitive and selfish while his wife, Emma, notes that "other men struck her as unbelievably vain and hostile and aggressive, ruthless in their drives for power and success and self-gratification . . . leav[ing] a trail of human debris in their wake." Molly Gilbert's uncommunicative husband, Mike, in Violet Weingarten's *A Loving Wife*,<sup>31</sup> is a familiar and exasperating type: "No one says anything and everything to anyone else. You [Molly] want to say everything that comes into your head; go see a psychiatrist." Mike is like Sasha Davis' husband: "By then I knew Frank's silence wasn't shyness at all — He simply had nothing to say to me." Jimmy, in *Such Good Friends*, is "childish and destructive, stubborn and stupid, hostile and uncooperative;" while Jane Robbins, in Weingarten's *Half a Marriage*,<sup>32</sup> whose husband, Jason, is living with another woman ("It's no roll in the hay. It's unique. Something special."), explains: "He [Jason] exists, therefore I am."

Yet, this is precisely the problem — life with men ("trapped, suffocating in that abysmal *we*"), and the inability to live without them. Sasha Davis notes: "I had never been able to pull a bye-bye without having a big hello ready for the next guy," and given the kind of men who people these novels, this fact is doubly debilitating. For Lois Gould this is the worst abuse of female potentiality — definition through a man — and the heroines of *Final Analysis*, *Such Good Friends*, and *A Sea-Change*, who seek to capture and appropriate male power (defined as the only kind of power there is), reveal the peril with which a woman attempts it. Laurie, the friend of the heroine in *Final Analysis*, has the last word on this subject: "Who cares how a man sees you? Why don't you care how you are?"<sup>33</sup>

*Woman as Thing*. Numerous feminist literary critics have pointed out the common feminine stereotype in literature: docile, compliant, or, as Marcia Landy puts it, "a silent, passive receptor."<sup>34</sup> "Ask the wife what she likes," Julie Messinger reflects, "this I like, and this, and this . . . and then ask her if she's ever told her husband. Of course not, she says; I wouldn't dream of it."

Jewish women novelists strongly object to this stereotype. Jane Robbins tells us, "I reached puberty in a climate where the women around me really did appear to think of themselves as objects," and it is "Lesson 1" for Julie Messinger: "You are a thing. A thing does not expect pleasure; it is used for the pleasure of its owner." Or, as her husband, Richard, explains to her: "Women are flowers; they are supposed to stay in place and look

30. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1952).

31. Violet Weingarten, *A Loving Wife* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

32. Violet Weingarten, *Half a Marriage* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

33. Surprisingly, given its enormous popularity among women, Nancy Friday's *My Mother/Myself* (New York: Delacorte, 1977) has the opposite advice: a woman alone is nothing; a man is the essence of a woman's fulfillment.



open and beautiful for the bee." Julie's response (expanded by Erica Jong into an entire novel) is, "Well, I can fly too, see," and most of these novelists' heroines demonstrate their revulsion from the stereotype by "flying" — that is, inhabiting their bodyselves fully. They overcome the repeated advice that "it is certainly not considered good form, Audrey, to discuss the curse [menstruation] or refer to it in mixed company," and find, in Erica Jong's words "a home of one's own" in and through their own sexuality. That is precisely why many of the heroines' sexual thoughts are disclosed as intimately as are those of Alex Portnoy, and why they have sexual feelings without and before the tutelage of the penis — men have said that women either don't, or certainly aren't supposed to, have such uninhibited desires.

*Housewife-manqué Syndrome*. Betty Friedan once described it as the "problem with no name" — the dilemma of trying to fill the role which parents and society expect of a woman and the role which our heroines seek in order to realize "their full human capacities." The favorite question of the heroine of *Final Analysis* is "that asked only of women, 'what do you *do* with yourself all day, now that the children are in School,'" and she cannot rid herself of the "guilty belief that I am not, in fact, doing any work at all unless I succeed in getting the rust stains out of my toilet bowl." And when she calls her great-aunt to announce that she has just finished a major magazine piece, her aunt replies: "When you said 'working,' I though you meant cleaning the house." Audrey Mortimer, torn up inside over giving up a career for a family, ultimately kills herself, in part, because everyone imagines that "Audrey wanted to be a mother — that was the first priority for her — and she was a realist. She knew she made a choice and she accepted it. I doubt if she ever really regretted anything."<sup>35</sup>

Anne Roiphe's *Up the Sandbox*<sup>36</sup> is perhaps the most perceptive portrait so far of the Jewish woman who is split between her emotional responsibility to her children and her demands to herself, while Violet Weingarten's *A Woman of Feeling*<sup>37</sup> and *Mrs. Beneker*<sup>38</sup> raise the same issue. The indifference of people to woman's accomplishments, combined with the diminution of hope in reconciling the dual roles, plays no small role in Emma Sohler's "fever of unknown origin," and there is a continual and painful struggle for many of the heroines between a desire for authenticity and those masks and roles that society expects them to wear in defiance of true selfhood.

34. Annis Pratt, "The New Feminist Criticism," *College English*, 32, 8 (May, 1971): 872-878; Mary Ellman, *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1968); Lynn Sukenick, "On Women and Fiction," in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, Arlyn Diamond and Lee Edwards, eds., (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 1977) pp. 28-44; Marcia Landy, "The Silent Woman: Towards a Feminist Critique," in *The Authority of Experience*, pp. 16-27.

35. Illuminating insight into this topic can be found in "Women on Women," *American Scholar*, 41, 4 (Autumn, 1972): 599-627, especially 623-625.

36. Anne Roiphe, *Up the Sandbox* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971).

37. Violet Weingarten, *A Woman of Feeling* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

38. Violet Weingarten, *Mrs. Beneker* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967).

*Jewishness.* Jews and Judaism permeate all of these novels, and no matter how much difficulty these women have in knowing where they are going, they never forget where they came from. The heroine of Anne Roiphe's *Long Division*<sup>39</sup> is a "wandering Jewess" gazing upon "land as flat as Passover matzo's;" Erica Jong, who created "bloody Jewish" Isadora Wing in *Fear of Flying*, writes of "a tiny spot of blood in the rubber yarmulke of the diaphragm;" while Barbara, Rabbi Moses Fabrikant's daughter, frets that "there isn't a ritual in the world I understand, and it's not for lack of trying."

Audrey Mortimer, "designs some sort of one-page roundup of the Sisterhood activities" for an Oneg Shabbat at Temple Beth Sholom, while Sasha Davis provides us with a vivid portrait of a Reform Sunday School class in Cleveland where, like an entire generation of Jewish children, she grew up with Soloff's womanless *When the Jewish People Was Young*. The "chicken-fat rabbi" who is to conduct Richard Messinger's funeral is satirically portrayed in *Such Good Friends*, as is Rabbi Stine ("How dare you [Sheila] waste the rabbi's time with a fake suicide. The rabbi is very busy, you know.") in Gail Parent's novel.

Positive Jewish attitudes and influences are to be found, but not in abundance. The son, in Sue Kaufman's "The Jewish Cemetery,"<sup>40</sup> is an exceptionally affirmative Jew, while Audrey Mortimer's mother moves her daughter with these words: "We're Jewish, dear, and that means that wherever you go, in the whole world, there are people with whom you share a common bond. Your ancestors were their ancestors. Wherever you go, you have a family."

*Female Humanity.* Sasha Davis is only one of the many heroines who discover the beginnings of self-affirmation. Barbara Fabrikant, the overweight girl with glasses, learns the joy of making her own decisions about her life and the paralyzing consequences of accepting "female" attributes such as "emotional [vs. intellectual], spiritual, irrational, unstable and intuitive." Elizabeth, a fat, sloppy, unloving, unhappy grad student who attempts suicide, discovers her feminism and becomes a good poet, superb teacher, generous daughter and happy wife. Jane Robbins, who "put him [Jason] on a pedestal, as I do all my men, as I like to look up," comes to understand that life does not "only begin when he comes through the door again."

These heroines struggle to establish authentic and self-determining, rather than reflexive, lives. And, like Isadora Wing, who angrily states that she "learned about women from men," they come "home" eventually on their own terms, usually convinced of the wisdom of the choice which they have made. It is Isadora, heroine of the novel which most successfully reveals a woman's intimacy with the personal experiences of female physiology, who offers the most compelling statement of what it means to

39. Anne Roiphe, *Long Division* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

40. Sue Kaufman, "The Jewish Cemetery," in *The Master, and Other Stories* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1976).

pass through life as a woman, of the essence of “growing up female in America” — “What a liability.”

This brief survey of three generations of imaginative literature reveals that the themes first adumbrated by Yeziarska are the perennial concern of Jewish women writers in America, and that from them we learn about ourselves and about the Jewish experience in America. The struggle of Jewish women with the themes of alienation, the search for identity and for meaning in a dehumanized age make these writers valuable sources of American Jewish social history. Not only the reality of the Jewish immigrant experience — where women with one foot in the past sought to free themselves from that which hemmed them in — but the tensions of their daughters and grand-daughters who are faced with parents (especially mothers) who will not let them go, highlight this fiction. Yeziarska's Jewish women are trapped in the Lower East Side; those of her literary descendants are trapped in the suburbs, in technology, and in the emotional inertness of American-Jewish middle-class life. It is this concern which sets these writers apart from both Jewish male and non-ethnic novelists.

Few, if any, Jewish men have understood Erica Jong's argument that women “think back” through their mothers, nor have they plumbed the depths of the tensions involved as Jewish women try to live with the powerful image of the perfect wife and mother — the compassionate, altruistic, forgiving martyr whose love is blind and unwavering — nor have they grasped the psychodynamics of private places. Not just the bed, but the nursery, the household, the family, kinship system and, especially, the dynamics of male-female/female-female relationships are explored by these women in order to discover how the experiences in these private areas have affected developments in the public sphere of American Jewish life.

Yeziarska sought to understand the effect upon Jewish women of the transformation from the traditional customs and rhythms of pre-industrial society to the economic and social structure of New York City — the invasion of American industrial culture into the life of immigrant Jewish women within the family. Those women writers who follow her in the American Jewish literary tradition alter the setting, but the same details, the same trivia of day-to-day life, the same private world of marriage practices, courtship customs, assumptions about women, and intra-familial tensions between mothers and daughters are explored as indices of cultural change and the adaptability of immigrant cultures to America.

Like Yeziarska, these writers leave politics, adventure, sports and business as subject matter marked “for men only,” and talk directly about the richness of womanhood, the contradictions involved between man and woman, the plenitude of female resources, the conflicts and paradoxes of feminine creativity in a male-defined and dominated cul-

ture, and, going beyond Yeziarska, argue that few human emotions are more fundamental and more pervasive than sexual needs and feelings. The difference, then, between “the ‘male’ approach to art and the ‘female’ is not,” as Shulamith Firestone has noted, “simply a difference of ‘style’ in treating the same subject matter . . . but the very subject matter itself.”<sup>41</sup>

And here, too, is where these Jewish writers part company from their non-ethnic counterparts. For the second and the third generation, new forms of entertainment, leisure, style, and adventure — the movies, television, travel, suburbs, hairdos, foods, socialized lives, dancing, fashions — are posed against the more traditional forms of culture: funerals, weddings, education, family interaction, celebrations and values. It is the tension between the transformation of social life in modern industrial America (with its concomitant premium placed on individuality and freedom) and these traditional Jewish patterns of life, which highlight the literature. These Jewish writers have shaped their work around the larger trends of technology and acculturation/assimilation, have asked (usually implicitly) what is especially Jewish about American Jewish life, and have sought to answer this question as well as to explore the impact of changes in American culture and values by exploring the sensibilities of Jewish women in America.

Most of them, in this journey of the imagination, have seen themselves as outsiders and, thus, when we find a narrator it is usually a female and she is generally excluded. Her observations — perhaps in part the result of her distance — seem especially intense, but they are an accurate reflection of Jewish female experience in America. It cannot be denied that most of the descriptions of American Jewish life overflow with joy and sorrows as Jewish men have experienced them. Whether the journey towards self-discovery and (usually) success is an interior or a physical one, it has been that of Jewish men. The special talent of the writers whom we have examined has been to create Jewish women who are the receptacles of all the psychic and emotional tension which the male world creates but will neither acknowledge nor deal with.

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41. Schulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1970), pp. 186–87.

# ***Secular Tradition In Our Day: An Exchange***

*In the Spring 1980 issue of JUDAISM, we published a paper by Ben Halpern entitled "Exile and Redemption: A Secular Zionist View." It is a cogent and well-reasoned effort to establish a base for a perdurable secularist Jewish philosophy. I believed his presentation to be so significant that in my "First Reader," which introduced the paper, I stepped out of character as editor and raised several questions with regard to the viability and long-term survival of such a Jewish worldview. To these questions, Dr. Halpern has responded in the comments published below. My reply to his response follows thereafter.*

## ***The Jewishness of Secular Judaism***

**BEN HALPERN**

Dear Dr. Gordis:

As you say in your "First Reader's" note in the Spring, 1980 issue of JUDAISM, many questions are left unresolved in my response in that issue to Sharon Muller's critique (JUDAISM, Summer, 1978). Your note raised a few such questions as representative, and I should like to discuss them briefly.

You ask whether a mere set of common symbols, devoid of a "common core of content," could suffice "to win young Jews . . . living in an open, free society, for loyalty to their Jewish identity" or "to forge world Jewish unity for a people living under conditions radically different in Israel and . . . the various lands of the Dispersion?" Let me begin my answer in a Jewish way, by countering with a question.

Did not a common set of symbols, rather than a distinctive common core of belief, maintain Jewish identity for centuries in the past? Whether dogmas were ever essential to Judaism is an old debate. What is beyond question is that, since the end of paganism, whatever the theological and ethical assumptions Jews held as their "common core of content," they were shared with the Gentiles amidst whom they lived. If they nonetheless were distinguished as a separate entity, it was through what Mordecai Kaplan (as you point out) calls their sancta and what I refer to as a symbol-set.

Certainly, Kaplan's own metaphysics, with its clear intent to bring Judaism into line with what he accepts in current thought, does not define a Jewish identity distinct from that of others'. It is again the common Jewish experience and the sense of form embodied in Jewish sancta that would be expected to accomplish this.

As to what might effectively "forge world Jewish unity," given the

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BEN HALPERN is the Koret professor in Judaic Studies at Brandeis University.

dispersion and diverse conditions of the people, here, too, your initial questions can be turned back upon themselves. In view of the sharp disputes over Orthodox hegemony in Israel, or, for that matter, the reaction to Kaplan's attempt to define an acceptable religious consensus for modern Jews, can anyone imagine that the attempt to use a "common core of content" as the criterion of Jewish identity could do other than serve to split the people? Precisely because of the dispersion and diverse conditions, not to say diverse beliefs or non-beliefs, of the Jews, only the formal framework of a common set of symbols can bring them (loosely) together.

But you could concede all this and still ask, as you do, whether the symbol-set that sustains Jewish unity and the identification of Jews can survive without a positive religious basis. In answer, let me make explicit certain things implied in my position.

First, with regard to the Diaspora: I do not share the view that assimilation, in a sense that could lead to the natural or spontaneous absorption of the Jewish entity by the Gentile environment to the point of submergence, is a real possibility and needs to be feared under present conditions. Such absorption requires the preliminary of conversion to a Christian faith, which is not a pressing need or urgent temptation for more than a fairly small number of Jews. The crux of the actual American Jewish problem is that we remain Jews while the symbol-set that gave meaning to Jewishness in the past has lost much of its meaning for all of the Jews and all, or nearly all, of its meaning for some of them. If assimilation were a real, and not merely an academic, possibility for nominal Jews in the latter situation, I should not oppose it but welcome it in regard to them.

Rather than to inculcate loyalty — a dubious undertaking — it seems to me that our problem is to find significant meaning in the Jewish experience of Diaspora Jews. The traditional concepts of Exile and Redemption, as I have often argued, gave a clear and present meaning to Jewish experience in the past, but have been emptied of much of their immediate meaning by the emancipation and the national liberation of the Jews. Yet, for secular Jews, the Jewish isolation and exposure, which still evoke echoes of the Exile tradition, are their most meaningful reminders of the inescapable significance of their Jewishness. This aspect of Jewish tradition is ritually evoked, but also effectively neutralized, in all schools of Jewish religious practice. For some Diaspora countries (like the United States or the other free, Western-style nations) religion is the accepted form of being Jewish, while secular Jewishness has become a nostalgic memory. But only in secular Jewishness (even though the most traditional religious Jews may be most open to the influence of Messianism and the idea of Exile) does the conception of Exile, however it may be suppressed or attenuated, represent the last refuge of meaningfulness in everyone's Jewish experience. Secular Jewishness is firmly rooted in Israel and more or less dominant in Russian Jewry and Latin American



Jewish communities. It is, no doubt, too much to expect that we should again — or soon, at any rate — have a common language to unite us. The best hope for a loose union of Jewish communities, which is vital if our Jewishness is to have meaning, is to maintain communication among the whole panorama of Jewries. The easiest, most acceptable way to achieve this is that which evokes the common tradition of our experience in Exile and our ancient hope for restoration in Zion.

Your question still stands: whether a Jewish ethos can be sustained without a basis in Jewish belief, and whether secular Jews can long “find a basis for their Jewish belonging” other than its religious component? For the Diaspora, the position I take has been made clear. The ultimate objective basis of the Jewishness of many may be the impossibility of assimilation without conversion, and the main dynamic force in the Jewishness of most may be the evocative sense of Jewish isolation and exposure. But in a situation where positive Jewishness must be cultivated as a cult, the public face of a religion is the most acceptable image of Jewishness and has decisive natural advantages in competing against alternatives. Institutional, self-conscious Jewish secularism is already virtually a thing of the past in the Diaspora — and not only because of Hitler.

This, I think, is a result of the special social circumstances of the Jews in dispersion. I should not agree that ethos is always and only an effect of religion. The point is too complex to argue briefly, so let me content myself with a few empirical observations. I know a number of people personally who were brought up in a thoroughly secular environment and have a firm ethical character and, in some cases, a style of ethical behavior, an ethos, that has a strongly marked freethinking or radical tradition behind it, one several generations removed from religious sources. Also, that ethical values are shared and communicable across different religious civilizations suggests to me that, in any ethos, basic human ethical motives are primary, and a religious rationale is the secondary framework with which a given society clothes them according to its own experience and tradition. I do not question, however, that there is a very powerful and general human need for such a rationale, and that it greatly facilitates the work of transmitting values from generation to generation.

To conclude these remarks on the Diaspora, let me say briefly that while both Israel and the Diaspora today seem to share your proposed “function” of attracting proselytes to Judaism, it does, somehow, seem to be more fitting to propose this as a function that the Diaspora might claim as its own. For myself, the observed facts (unless the reference were to be to the spread of monotheism among non-Jews by Christianity and Islam) do not seem to be very significant.

Your final question refers to my contention that “Israel cannot but be authentically Jewish to the degree that it confronts its own problems honestly.” I must pass, without responding, your initial remark, asking whether “other ethnic groups” would also become “Jewish” by being “honest,” as I am not sure whom you have in mind and, therefore, do not

quite grasp your meaning. Your main demurrer follows, when you ask whether the increasing distance from the religious tradition of succeeding generations of Israelis does not make the Jewish ethos increasingly inaccessible to them. To answer concretely and empirically, I may say that what is true, in general, of the children of the first settlers may be in process of cyclical reversal when the next generation, now taking over, is in question. This, to be sure, means a return to Jewish religiosity, out of ethical concern. But there is a more general answer to be made, one that does not beg the question in the same way.

An ethos is preserved and transmitted in a tradition, but it grows, and continues to grow, out of experience. Experience that enriches an ethos must be salient and significant. Here lies the difference, in this regard, between the Diaspora and Israel. What happened to Jews as Jews in the Diaspora was salient and significant experience that could nourish an ethos so long as the Exile was palpable and recognized. In our present happy circumstances, very little that happens to us as Jews, and not much that is done by us, has this quality. In Israel, on the other hand, all their multitude of serious problems — social, political, and even economic — happen to them as Jews; the symbol-set of their culture is Jewish; and, thus, “Israel cannot but be authentically Jewish to the degree that it confronts its own problems honestly.”

## ***Does Secular Judaism Have a Future?***

**ROBERT GORDIS**

Before turning to Dr. Halpern's statement, I wish to underscore my wholehearted sympathy for his endeavor. Secularist Jews often manifest a sensitivity to ethical issues and an active dedication to justice, freedom and peace probably unequalled, and surely not surpassed among other segments of Jewry. Yet, with all my heart, I wish I saw evidence that a secularist Judaism possesses staying power. Moreover, I am well aware of the fact that millions of our brothers and sisters, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, have not — or not yet — espoused a religious interpretation of the Jewish historical experience. We desire passionately to keep them and their children within the Jewish fold, even if their version of the tradition would impress others as attenuated and, therefore, unsatisfactory. As the father of Maimonides had occasion to write, “I would wish that a Jew held on to Judaism with his whole hand rather than with a single finger, but I would rather he held on with a finger than let go altogether.”

Unfortunately, the historical record and the contemporary scene offer scant grounds for optimism with regard to the survival of a secularist Judaism. Dr. Halpern virtually agrees with this judgment when he says: "Institutional, self-conscious Jewish secularism is already virtually a thing of the past in the Diaspora — and not only because of Hitler."

He then goes on to say: "What is beyond question is that since the end of paganism whatever theological and ethical assumptions Jews held, as their 'common core of content,' were shared with the Gentiles amidst whom they lived."

There are three contentions here that need to be examined:

1. To begin with the last, I find incomprehensible the statement that the "theological and ethical assumptions Jews held . . . were shared with the Gentiles among whom they lived." This identity was surely not recognized by those who perpetrated the massacres of the Crusades, the slaughters following the Black Death, the burnings of the auto da fe. Neither was this identity recognized by those who were their victims and died as martyrs for Judaism. Less bloody but equally passionate were the religious debates in the Middle Ages, which demonstrated the differences in the outlook of Jews on such basic ideas as the uncompromising unity of God, the faith in a Messiah yet to come, the authority of the law, as well as countless divergences in the specific ethics and content of Judaism and Christianity.

2. Dr. Halpern uses the term "dogmas" and "common core of belief" as though they were synonymous. It is true that Jewish tradition does not possess a set of dogmas, a series of precisely formulated propositions that must be accepted as a prerequisite for salvation. Even the august Maimonides, who propounded his famous *'Ani Ma'amin*, was unable to establish his "Thirteen Principles" as a *confessio fidei* for Jews. Men who freely recognized Maimonides' superiority to themselves did not hesitate to differ with him, both with regard to the content and the number of the basic doctrines of Judaism. What is more, *Klal Yisrael* never granted to Maimonides' creed the transcendental authority that he hoped for. That dogmas were never indigenous to Judaism, a contention first advanced by Mendelssohn, is true. But as Schechter and many other scholars have demonstrated, a core of beliefs, varying in extent, modified in time, and subject to different interpretations, has characterized the Jewish tradition in every age. Indeed, Judaism could hardly qualify as a religious tradition without such a conceptual basis.

3. Most directly related to Dr. Halpern's concern, the common set of symbols would have been impossible without such a core of common beliefs. The Sabbath, the Festivals, Kashrut, daily prayer, the most ubiquitous and visible of Jewish practices, not to speak of the *rites de passage* at birth, puberty, marriage and death, could never have arisen and would never have been maintained were they not an expression of fundamental beliefs regarding God, Israel, man and the world.

Dr. Halpern argues that, "In view of the sharp disputes over Or-

thodox hegemony in Israel, or for that matter the reaction to Kaplan's attempt to define an acceptable religious consensus for modern Jews, can anyone imagine that the attempt to use a 'common core of content' as the criterion of Jewish identity could do other than serve to split the people?" But neither, for that matter, does a symbol-set of practices serve to appease the Orthodox Establishment in Israel and its would-be imitators in America. On the contrary, experience has shown that their antagonism is strongest against those non-Orthodox groups whose regimen of Jewish observance is closest to their own. There is far more active hostility in Orthodox circles toward Conservatism than to Reform. The psychological mechanism and the pragmatic considerations that enter into this state of mind need hardly be spelled out. These factors can be seen operating in all orthodox partisan groups — political, social and economic, as well as religious. Liberty has been well defined as the spirit which is never entirely sure that it is right. Most orthodoxies of every type are "entirely sure" — or act as though they are — and, therefore, have built into their systems an incapacity to accord freedom to those who differ with them. In sum, the problem of achieving religious liberty and equality even for Jews in Israel remains, whether we approach Judaism from the standpoint of a core of belief or that of a common set of symbols.

I find inconceivable another point made by Dr. Halpern: "With regard to the Diaspora: I do not share the view that assimilation, in a sense that could lead to the natural or spontaneous absorption of the Jewish entity by the Gentile environment to the point of submergence, is a real possibility and needs to be feared under present conditions." Without joining the chorus of Cassandra's who are announcing the imminent disappearance of the Jewish community in America, tomorrow if not today, I am astonished at the ease with which Dr. Halpern dismisses the possibility of assimilation merely because conversion is relatively rare. It is, incidentally, more common than he assumes. He surely is aware of the rising tide of intermarriage from which only a fraction of new accessions to Judaism are won. To be sure, there is much that can be done to reduce the impact of assimilation, but no observer of the current scene believes that it can be totally prevented or eliminated. It is surely obvious that if the Jewish population is drastically reduced, the maintenance of Jewish institutions of religion, culture and education, and the pursuit of Jewish literature, scholarship, journalism, music and art will become difficult to the point of impossibility. The Jewish community would be reduced to a cluster of minority enclaves scattered over the country, unable to sustain group life or even group identity in any meaningful sense.

He concedes that "Your question still stands: whether a Jewish ethos can be sustained without a basis in Jewish belief, and whether secular Jews can long 'find a basis for their Jewish belonging' other than its religious component?" Dr. Halpern apparently pins his hopes on "the evocative sense of Jewish isolation and exposure." Does he mean the various manifestations of anti-Semitism which, admittedly, have reminded many Jews

of their origin and their relationship to their fellow-Jews? But different individuals may draw totally opposing conclusions. During the 1940s, it was still possible for German Jews to find refuge abroad, if American citizens signed affidavits that they would not become public charges. A friend of mine who had a rather unusual name was besought by a German Jew with the same name to send him an affidavit, which my friend proceeded to do. When the refugee and his family arrived in New York, my friend went to meet them. His namesake was profuse in thanking him for literally saving his life and that of his family: "I have no better friend in the world. Now that I am safe in America what would you advise? Should I join a Catholic or a Protestant church?"

Would Dr. Halpern be willing to have the content of Jewish experience restricted to anti-anti-Semitism? Would this not be a sorry end to a great and heroic saga of 4,000 years of Jewish loyalty, idealism and creativity?

He writes that, for him, "basic human ethical motives are primary," as they should be for any genuinely sensitive human being. Surely he does not need to be reminded that that is precisely the teaching of the authentic Jewish tradition. To cite only one stance from the legal literature of Judaism, the Mishnah (*Yoma* 8:9) declares, "For transgressions committed against God, Yom Kippur brings forgiveness. But it brings no forgiveness for transgressions committed against one's fellow man until one appeases him." The insistence of the Prophets on "doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with your God" (*Micah* 6:8) as the essence of man's duty needs no multiplication of sources.

Undoubtedly, individuals may achieve an ethical stance independent of a religious foundation. Whether such a position is philosophically tenable is another question and not our present concern. But, increasingly, it is being recognized that, in spite of all the weaknesses and sins of organized religion through the ages, the recognition of a transcendent power is indispensable to the maintenance of a viable moral system in society.

This truth is being acted upon in the State of Israel. The kibbutz movement is probably the greatest ethical movement on secular foundations in history. Today, many of its leaders, as well as other secular educators, are seeking a religious rationale in their educational program because they want a firm basis for the primacy of ethics. While some individuals in this search may turn to ultra-right-wing religious groups, there is an active search in kibbutz circles for a rapprochement with more modern interpretations of Judaism, be they *Masorati* (Conservative) or Progressive (Reform). Four decades and more of secular Jewishness in the State of Israel have demonstrated the necessity for a religious foundation for an enduring ethic.

Perhaps a personal reference may be pardoned. Several years ago, the Haifa Technion convened an international conference on "Science and Ethics," in which I was invited to participate. When the prepared

papers reached the conveners, they chose the one I had prepared, "Ethics in a Technological Society," for presentation at the opening public session of the Conference. It was subsequently published in the columns of JUDAISM (Winter, 1976), and a Hebrew version appeared in Israel in *Gesher*. I mention this small fact in Israeli life to indicate that there is a genuine quest to fill the ethical void with content from the Jewish tradition.

Dr. Halpern turns to group historical experience as the final arbiter of "faith and morals." I agree. To the extent that we may generalize from the millennial experience of the Jewish people and the variegated experience of the human race, it demonstrates, I believe, that an enduring society, be it national or worldwide, must rest upon a belief in a transcendent Power making for righteousness and in the correlative significance of every human being as created in the Divine image.

I wholeheartedly endorse Dr. Halpern's plea "to maintain communications between the whole panorama of Jewries." He speaks of "the *common tradition* of our experience" (italics mine). I am well aware of the intellectual and psychological difficulties involved in finding one's way to a new or modified worldview. But all who are genuinely concerned with the quality of human life and, indeed, its very survival, cannot avoid embarking on the enterprise. To modify slightly the words of the Sages, "You may not be able to reach the goal, but you have no right to desist from the journey."

# *Alternatives in Jewish Theology*

S. DANIEL BRESLAUER

## *Two Types of Jewish Theology*

WHAT IS JEWISH THEOLOGY? AS A DISCIPLINE, theological reflection is a rather recent innovation in Jewish scholarship. From the ancient period derive narratives, laws, prayers, songs, didactic collections. Whether from the Bible or Talmud, these texts serve the practical purposes of liturgy, communal law, personal religious instruction, historical lessons and reminders, rather than theoretical tasks. The literature of the Middle Ages is philosophical, mystical, or legal rather than theological. From Philo of Alexandria onwards, Jewish philosophy sought to systematize Jewish beliefs by concepts derived from non-Jewish philosophical traditions. Jewish mystics explored the hidden meaning of Torah and the esoteric reality of God's intimate nature. Jewish legalists applied the rules and precedents of Jewish law to the changing practical situations of Jewish daily life. These attempts to expand and transform Jewish religiousness are, by their very daring and creativity, non-theological. Theology is more descriptive than creative.

Bernard Bamberger captures this aspect of theology well when he defines it as the effort to "make the religious experience articulate in words."<sup>1</sup> He is certainly right to make the fact of religious experience central. Theology does not transform Jewish religiousness but, rather, reflects upon it. As a discipline, theology is not the creation of Jewish religion but an organized meditation upon that religion. Yet not all organized meditation is expressed in words. In fact, the mode of expression becomes the crucial aspect of any theology.

Bamberger himself recognizes this fact and distinguishes between what he calls "systematic" theology and "experiential" theology. This dichotomy is suggestive — theologians do seem to be divided between those for whom concepts and words are more important and those for whom the primal religious experience itself is paramount. Yet the concern with words and concepts seems to me only a symptom of a more basic presupposition. Bamberger's "experiential" theology is itself conceptual

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1. Bernard J. Bamberger, *The Search for Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1978), p. 1.

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S. DANIEL BRESLAUER is assistant professor in the department of religious studies at the University of Kansas.



and wordy because of his own prior commitment. The basic distinction, as I see it is between a focus on the norms of Jewish religion and on what evokes creative responses. Normative theology searches for certain criteria of authenticity to provide a framework for reflection. Certain types of experience are considered valid and, therefore, fit subject matter for the theologian; others are rejected as inappropriate. The structure of such normative theology is built around those standards which the particular theologian seeks as constitutive of an authentic or legitimate Jewish experience.

The second type of Jewish theology reflects on suggestive, problematic experiences which are "putatively" Jewish but not inarguably so. The theologian reflects on them because of their inherent interest, suggestiveness, and even their provocative ambiguity. This theology is "responsive" because at its core is not a set of norms or standards but, rather, the subjective response of the theologian to a set of experiences. While normative theology uses its reflections on Jewish existence to strengthen a prior commitment to a uniform and comprehensive model of Judaism, responsive theology encourages a more fluid view of Judaism and the Judaic experience.

#### *Varieties of Normative Jewish Theology*

While the dichotomy between normative and responsive theology is basic to this essay, it is advanced as a very general one. Within each type of theology many variations can be found. Normative theologians are well represented by traditionalists who, like Eliezer Berkovits, discover the norms of Jewish life in certain classical, legally-oriented, texts. Berkovits, for example, criticizes even such a classical philosopher as Maimonides for not meeting the norm of Jewish views of God.<sup>2</sup> Recent theologians, as might be expected, fare not better than Maimonides. They are dismissed because "at this time we have neither a theology nor a philosophy of Judaism that does justice to the essential nature of Jewish teaching about God, man, and the universe as expressed in the classical sources of Judaism. . ."<sup>3</sup>

While traditionalists seem united on the content of these "classical sources," others challenge that view. Jacob Neusner's approach is far more open and variegated although no less determinedly normative. He explicitly states that "The principal task of theology in Judaism is to draw out and make explicit the normative statements of the acknowledged sources of Judaism. . ."<sup>4</sup> His specific theological recommendations, how-

2. Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man and History: A Jewish Interpretation* (New York: Jonathan David, 1965), p. 55.

3. Eliezer Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: KTAV, 1974), p. vii.

4. Jacob Neusner, "The Tasks of Theology in Judaism," *Journal of Religion* 59,1 (January, 1979): 71.

ever, are far more imaginative and varied than a traditionalist's since he turns to the often-neglected as well as to the more standard Jewish texts for his inspiration and research.

Whereas both Neusner and Berkovits find within Judaism the norms around which they structure their theology, others look outside of the classical texts. Eugene Borowitz, for example, derives his norms from a creative tension between the classical tradition and the contemporary social reality of Jewish life. This social orientation has often been missed by Borowitz's critics, thus leading to a profound misunderstanding of his stance. In an early book he declared that, "I only know I must take my stand where I find myself and where I find a not insignificant fraction of my people gathering."<sup>5</sup> His continued work has been to discover and delineate just where that is. He has shown that American Jews are more committed than they even admit to themselves, that they are "marranos in reverse," for they hide their inner Jewishness from themselves.<sup>6</sup> The norms of Jewish life stem from what Jews are doing as well as from what Jews have written. Borowitz's defense of Reform Judaism is based on his view of those standards of Judaism which American Jewish life itself has provided and developed.<sup>7</sup>

Another source of the norms around which a theologian can structure his reflections is history. Emil Fackenheim seems to find in the Holocaust and the State of Israel such historical generators of Jewish norms. He abandoned liberalism, he recalls, when recognizing that "one of the first requirements for a *real* reconstruction of Jewish theology is to protest against the falsification and banalization Judaism has suffered by most, if not all, of its liberal interpreters."<sup>8</sup> This emphasis upon "falsification" demonstrates a normative approach to Jewish experience. As the criteria for authenticity became clear to Fackenheim he increasingly emphasized the Holocaust. His theology became a reflection on the "voice of Auschwitz" which, he feels, "commands the religious Jew after Auschwitz to continue to wrestle with his God in however revolutionary ways" and thus to become "a witness to endurance."<sup>9</sup>

Finally, one should admit that norms can come from outside of Jewish experience altogether. Despite William Kaufman's call for an "open" Jewish theology, he establishes a set of normative standards. These derive from his pragmatic and rationalist approach to Jewish thought rather than from the tradition itself. He acknowledges that

5. Eugene B. Borowitz, *A New Jewish Theology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 8.

6. Eugene B. Borowitz, *The Masks Jews Wear: The Self-Deceptions of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 10.

7. Eugene B. Borowitz, *Reform Judaism Today: What We Believe* (New York: Behrman House, 1977).

8. Emil Fackenheim, *Quest For Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 59.

9. Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophic Reflections* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 95.

"Finding support in the massive and multivalent tradition of Judaism for these criteria is not, however, the most significant point;" rather, he advocates the use of "universal canons of rational discourse."<sup>10</sup> His call may be a legitimate one, but its normative stance means that his theology is structured before he begins reflecting on the experience of Jewish life.

### *Varieties of Responsive Theology*

The responsive theologian, in contrast to the normative thinker, is less interested in authenticating his views than in evoking experience. He allows the experiences themselves to determine the structure of theology. Such an approach is dangerous, particularly for traditionalists. Is it possible to maintain the structure and framework of Jewish law and community while permitting Jewish experience, as such, freely and responsively to structure theology? Abraham Heschel solved this problem by dividing theology itself into two types. Theology, per se, is a normative, structured endeavor, reflecting upon the specific content of a parochial tradition. It stays within the boundaries of authority. But Heschel advocated a new type of theological reflection which he called "depth-theology." In it, the basic parochial issues of Judaism — the chosen people, certain halakhic problems, liturgical issues about specific, individual passages — are avoided. The focus is, rather, on the general human need to serve God, the human restlessness with law, the problem of prayer as one besetting all people. "Theologies divide us," Heschel wrote; "depth-theology unites us." He reflected on Jewish experiences in order to discover their depth-theological meaning, and allowed that meaning to be evoked by his use of language, his imagistic vividness, his probing of the roots of each experience. He refused, often to the distress of his readers, to structure his theology in clearly normative ways.

While Heschel used the distinction between "aggadah" and "halakhah" as a means of using specifically Jewish terms to point to a generally human need for both order and freedom, some later thinkers use it as a distinction between two types of theology. An aggadic theology of Judaism, in this sense, stimulates the imagination in order to infuse freedom into the sturdy framework of halakhic Jewish living. David Novak, explicitly acknowledging his debt to Heschel, suggests this approach. Theology is imaginative because Jewish law is concrete; theology is responsive because the framework of Jewish life is secure and established by the legal tradition:

The grounding of the commandment in a reality comprehended by God alone is what the Aggadah is emphasizing. Because this aspect of the Mitzvah is beyond man's control it cannot be described by the usual means of

10. William E. Kaufman, *Contemporary Jewish Philosophies* (New York: Behrman House, 1976), p. 23.

11. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 119.

ratiocination. It can only be apprehended through that aspect of man's nature which is not under his control — his imagination.<sup>12</sup>

Theology is, thus, the grounding for Jewish law. A responsive, freely structured theology is the only type possible, since it complements, but does not replace, Jewish legalism. Theology serves a purpose which law cannot fulfill — stimulating the human imagination. To do so it must be free, uncontrolled, responsive.

Other thinkers are less traditional and are unconcerned about keeping the formal structure of Jewish law intact. They agree with Novak that imagination is the key to theology, but disagree that the images need to stay within the framework of tradition. These theologians seek new images that are as powerful as those traditionally used, if not more so. Not unnaturally, they have found them in their own lives. The confrontation of the images of personal experience with the structure of the Jewish past parallels that of aggadah with halakhah. The genre of autobiographical theology, of telling one's own story as a means of theological communication, has become a mechanism for a responsive Jewish theology. Out of an encounter with images derived from the theologian's own life a new understanding of Jewish religiousness may arise.

Such an approach characterizes many contemporary contributions to Jewish theological reflection. Mark J. Mirsky's *My Search for the Messiah* is animated by an excitement derived from the transformation of private experience into public theology.<sup>13</sup> Richard Rubenstein has offered a variety of helpful reflections on his own religious development. Defending the autobiographical approach, he notes that "events in the history of religion can become encounters between past and present."<sup>14</sup> Arthur Waskow has provided evocative reflections on his own religious development, first from "Jewish radical to radical Jew,"<sup>15</sup> and then in a stimulating narrative which demonstrates how "[f]rom our many different life experiences we wrestle with each other. And we wrestle with Torah and all the Jewish experience."<sup>16</sup>

### *Towards a Responsive Image of Judaism*

We naturally expect a variety of presentations of Judaism from a responsive theology. The normative theologians, however, surprise us by also disclosing a variety of Judaisms. Even traditionalists like Berkovits and Neusner differ; the Judaisms of Borowitz, Fackenheim, Kaufman are radically diverse. Can an image of such a diversity, which will also include

12. David Novak, *Law and Theology in Judaism*, foreword by Louis Finkelstein (New York: KTAV, 1974), p. 12.

13. Mark Jay Mirsky, *My Search for the Messiah* (New York: Macmillan, 1977).

14. Richard L. Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 3.

15. Arthur I. Waskow, *The Bush is Burning: Radical Judaism Faces the Pharaohs of the Modern Super-State* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

16. Arthur I. Waskow, *Godwrestling* (New York: Schocken, 1978), p. 4.

the distinction between normative and responsive approaches, be suggested? I think that it can, and that with that suggestion still another responsive approach can be indicated: a responsive theology built out of a compilation of images derived from historical, personal, and fictional narratives about Jewish life and Jewish religious experience.

Micah Josef Berdichevsky provides an imaginative evocation of the situation that we have outlined. He tells how, when he was a small child, his mother would share with him a world of fantasy and imagination. The mysterious folktales of Eastern European Jewry — mysterious just because they merged clearly Biblical motifs with slightly “forbidden” spice from gentile traditions — fascinated him. At the age of five he began to go to school and found that the world of the Bible provided the same imaginative collage as had the world of folklore. The ancient patriarchs and matriarchs became his companions. In the winter’s cold he was warmed by the hot Egyptian sun evoked by the book of Exodus. In summer, Hosea called forth the fluttering of bird’s wings to cool him. The geography of ancient Israel was more real to him than was that of his native land. Here we have a responsive theology. Reflecting on narratives and folklore, on myths and the tantalizing suggestiveness of Biblical narrative, the youth created a world of his own.

At the age of seven, however, the child was introduced to the study of the Talmud, the source of Judaism’s norms and standards. Suddenly he was confused and uncomfortable. Unnecessary questions plagued him when concentrating on a page of Gemarah. Two men find and seize a single garment. The child, thinking of the Bible and Midrash, immediately asked: what were their names, what color and shape was the garment, how many children did each man have? The Talmud teacher became angry. “We are dealing with law,” he remarked, “and not with stories. Not everything in Judaism is like the tales in the Torah.” The boy responded angrily, out of his frustration. “I thought that Talmud is Torah, too!” “You are a fool,” the teacher retorted. “We have two Torahs, one written and one oral.” The boy persisted in his questioning, “Why didn’t God just give us one Torah?” Surprisingly, the teacher did not respond with the well-known midrash suggesting the need for two revelations since the non-Jews would claim the written Torah as their own. Instead, the boy was told to get back to work. The teacher conceived of Jewish study as a process by which the norms of Judaism are instilled in the young, not a means of evoking imaginative response. The boy challenged this approach, suggesting that even Talmud can become Torah, that is, a popular narrative evoking response and imagination.

The boy’s question about the need for two Torahs was not answered immediately but it did receive a reply on *Simhat Torah*, when Jews rejoice in the reading of the written law. In that particular town there were two synagogues. One was an elaborate structure attended by the majority of the townspeople. Its splendor, popular appeal, and general prosperity

were evident on Simḥat Torah, since its ark was filled with many Torah scrolls resplendently ornamented. The entire community — men, women, children — sang and danced, each rejoicing in accordance with his own level of understanding of Judaism. This synagogue provided the community with its means of self-expression.

At the same time a smaller, poverty-stricken synagogue had been constructed in a depressed neighborhood. There, a few Hasidim lived in the midst of squalor, darkness, and poverty. Their small hovel served as a home and synagogue. It housed a few books but no Torah. Gloom settled over them. All at once one of the group roused himself and seized a volume of the Talmud. "You know, dear Jews," he cried, "how much these volumes means to us. We have no scroll of the law but we have the oral law itself. Let us raise these volumes on high and go forth to dance in rejoicing before the Lord. If we have the oral law should we have a lesser portion *than our brothers with their written law?* Let them keep their texts, we can rejoice in its fulfillment which we possess." Lifting the volumes high, jumping, clapping their hands, leaping and shouting with joy, this group of scholarly elite went forth into the multitude. One of their number, the lad's teacher of Talmud, came to him and, caught up in fervor, exclaimed, "Fool! Now do you know why the written law and the oral law were not given as one Torah?"

The contrast between an elitist formulation of Judaism in a normative and standardized theology and a popular and responsive Jewish theology stands sharply in relief in the story. The elite, the interpreters of the oral law, separate from the community and attempt to impose their Judaism on the multitude. They cannot succeed since responsive theology is more natural and popular, but they transform the freedom and joy of Judaism into a celebration of their own elite status. Normative Judaism expresses a social elitism; responsive theology appeals to the general Jewish community, to the individual who has not studied, who is not an expert, but who feels Judaism naturally.

The emphasis upon responsive theology as most natural raises a problem which must be faced. Why need there be responsive theologians if every Jew has the natural capability of such responsiveness? Heschel or Novak can respond that the polarity within Judaism itself makes it essential that theologians arise to preserve a balance. Rubenstein and Waskow can suggest that personal experience, autobiography, can help others interpret their own life experiences. Still another and, to my mind, more powerful reason, derives from Berdichevsky's story. The individual Jew is constantly challenged by theologians. Even as reassuring an approach as that of Borowitz tells the ordinary Jew that he needs others to interpret his own inner life, to strip off the mask that he shows to himself. It is natural that the modern American Jew suffers a crisis of self-confidence. Nowhere is this fragile self-confidence of the American Jew more evident than in theology. Israeli politics can be discussed like any other politics;



the business of raising money and organizing charities is clearly business as usual. But theology is somehow more obscure, less natural, more clearly in the hands of experts. A theologian advocating a responsive theology might well consider whether an autobiographical approach does not intimidate the reader as well as stimulate him. Perhaps a responsive theology could begin, not with the theologian himself or the structure of tradition, but by the presentation of a compendium of Jewish images.

The responsive theologian has the responsibility of showing that reflecting on Jewish belief is not merely an elitist privilege but is open to every individual Jew. Readers of such a theology will have not only an example of how to proceed, but the basic material out of which they can build their own responsiveness. Confidence and basic equipment are the best motivations which a theologian can provide.

### *The Structure of a Responsive Theology*

The attempt must be made, therefore, to create an imaginative approach to Judaism which is neither excessively traditional nor idiosyncratically autobiographical. The modern Jew can find self-confidence and self-motivation through an encounter with the images and narratives from the Jewish past and from his own experience. The structure of this encounter will take place within a framework provided by the theologian but will not be itself devised by him.

The theologian can begin by collecting and compiling varieties of images from narrative material, legal works, or liturgical sources. An eclectic use of sources — legalistic, mystical, philosophical, political, fictional — will insure variety. A playful investigation of a variety of themes — from women to catastrophe, from God's meaning and shape to Israel and its mission — can stimulate interest and a sense of self-recognition.

Theological reflection on these images might well begin with a study of their practical consequences. Did they arise out of social necessity? Do they imply certain socio-political effects? Data from Jewish history can show how the same controlling image often initiated and sustained a wide variety of social and personal structures. This very historical insight becomes a liberating force, enabling an individual to feel justified in his own theological response.

Consideration of the modern situation and of options in modern image-making can further increase the individual's sense of justification. The radically diverse contexts of Jewish life — urban centers, suburbs, rural environments, the academic community — make a single response to any image well nigh impossible. The theologian has a responsibility to show the variety of legitimate responses which are possible in different modern contexts. His task is to confront the reader with options and, thereby, to make these Jews participants in the creation of theology itself.



*The Written and Oral Law Reconsidered*

As an exercise in responsive theology Berdichevsky's theme — the distinction between the oral and written law — is suggestive. Traditionally and symbolically, and in the story itself, this difference is identified with the Talmud and the Bible. The latter is the received text transmitted in writing to Moses at Sinai and, through him, to the entire people. The Rabbinic tradition, however, according to the chain of transmission given by the Mishnah, was transmitted orally to Moses and by him, again orally, to Joshua and only recorded in writing during a time of persecution centuries later. The distinction is, thus, an image of the two groups of Jews, elitist and popular, with whom the Rabbis had to deal. More specifically, from a historical point of view, the written law was the province of the Sadducean priests and the oral law the possession of the Pharisaic teachers.

Berdichevsky transforms this historical image into a socio-political one. The majority has a natural instinct for the vivid, vital, tradition of the Jewish folk. The minority elite are out of touch with that vital tradition. The elite oppress the folk and try to deprive them of their native joy. Even the happiness of the elite tends to be a reaction against, and a justification in the face of, the natural joyfulness of the common people. Here the contrast is between the oral law as a mechanism of oppression and the written law as the self-expression of the oppressed.

From a more pragmatic standpoint, the image is that of an explication of a recondite text. One story tells that a heathen came to Hillel and sought to learn only the written law but not the oral law. Hillel seemed willing enough to oblige, but the heathen became constantly confused. At first, Hillel explained a letter one way and then in a different way. He continued teaching by saying, "You wanted to learn only the written law, didn't you?" Even to understand the written law you need to know the oral tradition. The alphabet is meaningless without a tradition explaining how it is to be used.

The Jewish mystic took this image of the oral law as the indispensable explication of the written law and refashioned it. The Torah as a written law is capable of a multiplicity of meanings because it indicates the infinity of God. The external meaning of the written law is merely suggestive, indicative of God's infinite variety. The written law is the code through which men understand God's enduring presence in reality. The oral law is the recondite key by which that code can be deciphered. Judaism has a two-fold law, not merely because every written document needs a tradition of interpretation, but because the Jewish written law is a mystic code which needs an esoteric tradition to decode it.

For the mystic, the written law is primal truth but written in a secret code. Samson Raphael Hirsch, the nineteenth century Jewish advocate of a new Orthodoxy, who combined "*derekh erez*," the custom of the country, with "Torah," the Jewish tradition, approached the problem in an oppo-

site way. The oral law is the full code, the entire tradition, which has been briefly summarized in the written law. The written law is a set of notes, reminders by which the oral law is recollected. The oral law is primary and, thus, superior to the written law; it is the basis for all revealed truth. Since human beings cannot keep the entire content of revelation clear in their minds, the written law refreshes their memory.

We have noted five images of the contrast between the written Torah and the oral Torah. One focuses on two leadership groups; one supported by popular tradition — the priests who preserve the written law — and the other supported by a scholarly tradition — the Pharisees who preserve an elitist oral law. Another is more general: a powerful elite seeks to dominate an oppressed populace. Still another image is more intellectual: every text requires an interpretation in order to be understood. Still another focuses on the depth of human ignorance: appearances only deceive; human beings need an esoteric tradition to save them from mistaking appearances for reality. A final image suggests that writing is but an afterthought. Truth is existential, lived, experienced. Writing is only a secondary distillation of that truth.

What social consequences attended these views? The contest between Pharisee and Sadducee led to an uneasy balance between the two parties. The Pharisees allowed the priests to offer sacrifices, to maintain their prestigious position and to preserve their dignity. At the same time, the Sadducees conceded to the Pharisees the right of interpretation, the right to modify ancient procedures, and to intervene in their ritual performances.

For Berdichevsky, the major problem was not the party politics of priests and Pharisees but of the nascent Zionist movement. Would Aḥad Ha-am's intellectualism win the day? The image that he projected was meant to win back Zionists from Aḥad Ha-am's seductive elitist position. He advocated a Nietzschean celebration of nature, of secularism, of a new Jew. In this perspective, his image takes on social and political significance.

Hillel's contention that the tradition needs explication became the basis of all Jewish legalism. The justification of interpretation, the legitimation of a process of *takkanot*, new insights, and renewed discussions of halakhic problems is found in this image. It implies an on-going effort to explicate and expand a written and accepted tradition.

The medieval mystical image focused on the inability of the legalistic tradition to exhaust the meaning of Judaism. The domination of the Jewish community by legalists left many individuals unsatisfied, and even the personal longings of a legalist like Joseph Karo needed the outlet of mystical expression. The mystics were able to acknowledge the authority of Jewish law and still find room for individualism through their multi-layered interpretation of the tradition. Personal insight, then, need not challenge existing institutions but can complement them. The transcen-

dent value of a pragmatic law may reside in its hidden meaning without damaging its practical literalism.

Samson Raphael Hirsch stood as a lone defender of Judaism at a time when Biblical scholarship, in general, and Reform Jewish scholars, in particular, threatened the status of the Bible as a sacred document. He recognized the challenge which "higher anti-Semitism" made to the Bible as holy writing. It was foolish to attempt to answer these critics on their own ground. What was needed was an indication that their entire enterprise was misguided. Hirsch's image of the written law as a sort of stenographic shorthand for the oral law provided a means of discrediting Biblical scholarship. Of course, secular scholars would misinterpret the Bible. They had no access to its real meaning because they did not know the reality which it briefly summarized. Lecture notes in the hands of a person who has not listened to the lecture seem random, incomprehensible, foolish. Reformers make just that error when they seek to interpret the Bible without reference to the oral tradition. Thus, Hirsch's image helped establish his Neo-Orthodoxy as a strong alternative to Reform Judaism.

Various images of the relationship between written and oral Torah, thus, involve different political and social realities. If nothing else, these conflicting images and realities point to a continuous struggle within Judaism. The need to balance innovation and tradition, change and stability, have often created a new image of the relationship between the written law and the oral tradition. The dynamic interaction between this image and social life shows how essential the image of Torah actually is in Jewish life and, also, how real the influence of social and political options can be in the perception of Torah.

The modern Jew, like the ancient Jew, looks at the image of written and oral Torah through the prism of peculiarly contemporary experiences of Jewish life. Refracted light from differing social, generational, and cultural backgrounds produces new configurations in the image. Many Jews live in an easy relationship with non-Jews. They feel comfortable in the general culture, yet they are restless with Jewish particularism. Their cosmopolitan life stresses universalism; their personal identity implies a cultural parochialism. The image of the relationship between the oral law and the written law may symbolize their situation. The written law may be seen as the basic universal principles of morality, much as the Noahide laws were once understood. All human beings are to be joined in the Biblical tradition of human dignity, hope for the future, and social justice. The oral law is that tradition as lived out by one cultural group; it is the collective memory of the Jewish people as it sought to explore Biblical ideals in a historical situation. All human beings can learn from this historical example, but only Jews can claim this example as their own.

Another Jew may feel the pull between social conformity and individual self-expression particularly acutely. The social consciousness which sociology, psychology, and anthropology instill in us is strong. We

recognize how much we are conditioned by society. On the other hand, existentialism, the demand to act maturely and independently, an emphasis on self-determination, lead us out of group conformity. How is an individual to reconcile the demand to conform to social patterns and, thus, be an adjusted, socialized human being, with the equally powerful pressure for self-expression? This Jew might find an echo of his situation in the tension between the oral law and the written law. The written law is the framework established by society; it is the background of human existence. The oral law is self-engagement, the personal creativity which grows out of a response to that framework; it is personal space in the midst of social existence.

An interpretation growing out of the themes of this study might suggest that the written law represents the accumulated images of the Jewish tradition. The "cumulative tradition" of Judaism, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith might say, establishes the framework of Jewish living. The written heritage, the traditional practices, the liturgical experience are the basis for any personal Jewish life. The oral law, however, suggests Jewish theology. The interpretation and structuring of that experience, the meaning of that experience, arises from an individual confrontation with Jewish images. The Jewish person begins by looking at images created by others. The theological reflection upon these images creates out of them a uniquely personal structure.

Such an approach means that the definition of "Judaism" must be flexible. Certainly the images collected as part of the "written law" provide the basis of commonality among Jews. There is inevitably an overlap between the images chosen by different individuals as the content of their theologies. Yet this overlap should not be stressed too much. There are a variety of Jewish images and not every Jew will respond to, or select, the same sets of images even on a subject such as the oral and written Torah. Most certainly, any single Jewish theology will not conform to a predetermined norm of Judaic theologizing. The very point to be made is that the individual should be free to structure Judaism in a responsive way. The Judaism of such a theology might be called Judaic on the basis of its content, but certainly not on the basis of its conclusions or structure.

Perhaps a better way of defining such a theology as Judaic is to see its use of images as peculiarly Judaic. The desire to allow the written and oral traditions to overlap, to unite both authority and freedom, norms and responsiveness might be the key to the Judaism of such a theology. A theology that sees the written law in terms of a tradition of images is not entirely without roots. A structured theology that owes its structure to personal reflections cannot be called authoritarian or domineering. Walking the line between these two alternatives is perhaps the essentially Judaic aspect of responsive theology.

An attempt to defend the authentic Jewishness of any responsive theology is inevitably self-defeating. Authenticity is as much a product of

normative theology as is a set of criteria by which to determine such authenticity. A responsive Jewish theology must take the demand for authenticity seriously. Normative Jewish thinkers are part of the cumulative tradition and are an important source of Jewish images. The necessity for reflection upon Jewish norms, together with a restlessness with them, is part of the attraction of a responsive Jewish theology. Such a theology is precarious because it is suggestive rather than authoritarian, imagistic rather than conceptual, contextual rather than ultimate. Yet this very precariousness is itself an invitation, a temptation held out to all who are attracted by Jewish images. This study attempts to add to the temptation and invite the expert, as well as the novice, to join in an effort to develop responsive theology.

# *Words For Passover*

MELVIN WILK

Now the hard, cage-cold days are carried off in a palm of wind,  
the hand of God moving lavishly over the frozen creek.  
The ice splits.  
Water returns in a murmuring run.  
Through the softening black banks, crocus leaves shoot, like green sparks.

We too continually return here to our people,  
learning again what there is always to be learned at this table,  
our proper place:  
only together may we taste the bitterly sublime experience  
of our continuous redemption.

In the blessing of wine shared, in the warm, exile-diminishing wind,  
in memory and expectation  
our hearts thaw, filling our vision with sympathy.  
None is saved but through the life of a people  
lived here in its sacred places on earth.  
So shall you who live now in thrall be free  
if, when the resolute hand unfolds itself towards you,  
you grasp it.

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MELVIN WILK *teaches literature and creative writing at Southwestern Community College,  
in Creston, Iowa.*

# “Of All Small Things . . .”

DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL

THE FOLLOWING STORY IS TOLD IN THE Bible (Genesis 47: 20-21):

So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for the Egyptians had sold their fields because the famine had become hard for them; and the land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, Joseph moved them from all over the realm to the cities.

In these two sentences, the silence outweighs the story, for who could retell the anguish of displacement and relocation that these two verses implied for so many? In reflecting on Joseph's act and its emotional impact, the late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr. J.H. Hertz, reasoned: “The cities became ‘concentration camps’ for facilitating the distribution of food.” With this comment, Dr. Hertz meant to make Joseph's action seem less heartless and perhaps even kind for, now, Joseph could better feed the Egyptians.

“Concentration camps?” Did the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire write that Joseph had set up “concentration camps?” Lesser words have been eliminated from the use of morally sensitive men and women! Actually, Dr. Hertz did write that Joseph had set up “concentration camps” in Egypt and he did mean that comment to humanize Joseph's seemingly cruel act. But Dr. Hertz published those words in May, 1936, the year of the first edition of his translation and commentary. In that year (and, in October 1937, when the first one-volume edition appeared), the words “concentration camp” did not have the horror attached to them that they were to have later. In 1936-7, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire did not know what the near future held, what the words “concentration camp” were to come to mean. Strange, perhaps shocking, to tell, Dr. Hertz did not make any change in the March, 1941, American edition of his translation and commentary, for the phrase occurs as published in 1936 (*ad loc.*, page 117). Did he not know in 1941? Or was he unaware of the reference, preoccupied perhaps with greater problems?

To be sure, the Holocaust made it impossible to leave in the text a reference to Joseph setting up “concentration camps” in Egypt. Whatever Joseph did, whatever his motive, he certainly did not set up “concentration camps” in the sense that those words acquired after World War II.

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DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL is associate professor in the department of religion, Emory University, Atlanta, Ga.



And, after the death of the late Chief Rabbi in 1960, the trustees of his estate issued a second edition. This one included some additional material and, here and there, a change was made in the text itself. At Genesis 47:21, the comment was changed to read: "The cities became depots for facilitating the distribution of food." (Interestingly, some copies of the 1958 printing read "depots" and some read "concentration camps.")

Of all small things  
That have the most infernal power to grow,  
Few may be larger than a few small words  
That may not say themselves and be forgotten.

Edward Arlington Robinson

## IT'S FINALLY AVAILABLE!

Dear friend,

As you know, the Jewish people are being confronted with a multi-million dollar campaign waged by Christian missionaries. Jewish youth especially are constantly being approached by Christian missionaries, Jews for Jesus, Messianic Jews,

Moonies, and other Christian groups. Unfortunately, most Jews do not know how to deal with the situation in an intelligent manner. They do not know what to say when a missionary discusses religion with them. Parents and friends do not know how to **rationaly** discuss the issue with a child or friend who is contemplating conversion to Christianity.

**YOU  
TAKE  
JESUS,  
I'LL TAKE GOD**  
  
HOW TO REFUTE  
CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES  
  
BY SAMUEL LEVINE

Fortunately, the above problem is now solved. A book has been written that is a complete guide to the refutation of Christian missionaries. The book, which is called, *You Take Jesus, I'll Take God*, includes:

- the methods and techniques that are used by the missionaries;
- the Biblical "proofs" that the missionaries present;
- strong historical and theological questions that you could ask the missionary or potential convert, in order to point out the difficulties of Christianity;
- an actual, lengthy correspondence with a missionary — so that you would be able to feel and understand the nature of a dialogue with a missionary.

This book will surely stop any rational person from ever becoming a Christian. Everyone, and especially our Jewish youth, should read this book before they ever meet a missionary. Of course, it is essential reading for any person who is already contemplating conversion to Christianity.

Ask for the book at your Jewish bookstore  
or write to:

**HAMOROH PRESS** P.O. Box 48862 Los Angeles, Ca. 90048

# *Gathering the Sparks*

HOWARD SCHWARTZ

Long before the sun cast a shadow  
Before the word was spoken  
That brought the heavens  
And the earth  
Into being  
A flame emerged  
From a single  
Unseen  
Point  
And from the center of this flame  
Sparks of light sprang forth  
Concealed in shells  
That set sail everywhere  
Above  
And below  
Like a fleet of ships  
Each carrying its cargo  
Of light.

Somehow  
No one knows why  
The frail vessels broke open  
Split asunder  
And all the sparks were scattered  
Like sand  
Like seeds  
Like stars.

That is why we were created —  
To search for the sparks  
No matter where they have been  
Hidden  
And as each one is revealed  
To be consumed  
In our own fire  
And reborn  
Out of our own  
Ashes.

Someday  
When the sparks have been gathered  
The vessels will be  
Restored  
And the fleet will set sail  
Across another ocean  
Of space  
And the word  
Will be spoken  
Again.

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HOWARD SCHWARTZ *teaches at the University of Missouri, St. Louis.*

# *Rav Kook and the Mysticism of Political Renewal*

Review-Essay by DAVID ARIEL

*Abraham Isaac Kook – The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems.* Edited and translated by BEN ZION BOKSER. New York, Paulist Press, 1978. xxvii and 415 pp. \$6.95 (paperback).

“Expanses divine my soul craves.  
Confine me not in cages  
Of substance or of spirit.”

“We must take whatever is good from any source where we find it to adorn  
our spirit and our institutions.”

-Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

DURING THE PAST TWO CENTURIES, JEWS have often discounted the presence of a persistent mystical tradition in their midst. Some, attracted by the possibility of participation in the enlightened culture and intellectual life of European civilization, embraced a rationalist and universalist interpretation of Judaism at the expense of its strong mystical and messianic tendencies. Others, not willing to pay the high cost of assimilation, consolidated and sharpened the modes and methods of rabbinic learning and minimized the personal mystical dimension in rabbinic Judaism. However, through all this, the mystical expression in traditional Judaism was never far below the surface nor can its importance in all periods of Jewish history, including our own, be underestimated.

The enduring vigor of the mystical strain of Judaism is evident in the monumental figure of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Chief Rabbi of Palestine from 1919 to 1935. Rav Kook, as he is known, emerged from the great Lithuanian rabbinic academy of Volozhin and the intellectual currents of European enlightenment into the nascent Zionism of the early twentieth century by way of a profoundly Jewish mystical understanding. At once an orthodox religious Zionist and a mystic of deep universal vision, he exhibits the complexities of intellect and spirit which characterize those religious masters whose home is Judaism but whose larger domain is human civilization. With the publication of Ben Zion Bokser's anthology of the major writings of Rav Kook in English, we see the integration of

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DAVID ARIEL teaches courses in Judaic studies in the department of religion at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut.

humanist intellectual currents with the ideology of religious Zionism refracted through the personality of this extraordinary mystical thinker.

Throughout this volume of treatises, essays, letters, and poems, we see that Rav Kook's mystical outlook is the product of personal experience expressed in the language of the late Kabbalistic tradition. In the sixteenth century, Isaac Luria Ashkenazi taught a mystical theology which appealed to his contemporaries because of their intimate familiarity with exile and dislocation in the wake of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. This mystical doctrine portrayed creation as intrinsically imperfect although man was invested with the capacity to perfect and, therefore, complete, the process of creation. The perfection of God, Luria taught, was unique and the attempt to duplicate His own perfection and to embody it in creation could not be accomplished without producing disruption and chaos. In attempting to communicate something of His own essence to the world, God overwhelmed its capacity to serve as a vessel for divine perfection. The overload led to a fracture in the process of creation and produced a world in which pain, evil, exile, and disorder predominate. The moral failures and suffering of human life are real features of existence and not, primarily, the result of human choice.

Man can choose, however, to repair the fracture, which is not of his own making, through acts of repentance. Repentance is transformed here and is not merely a technique of returning to the correct and prescribed actions, but is an active process in which God and His creation are returned to their status as it was conceived before the break. Continuing the tradition which began with Luria and was refined by the Hasidic teachers, Rav Kook taught that the inner disposition of the soul to seek goodness is affected by the structure of existence. All urges, impulses, failures, and hateful thoughts are the deepest reflections within man of the fracture which is perceived in the world. These inclinations can themselves be repaired and restored through acts of penitence rather than through repression of the urges. Repentance begins with the recognition of the reality, power, and origin of these impulses and proceeds to transfer and transform the passion and force of these urges to the passionate and forceful performance of the penitential act. Holiness is achieved through the freely chosen act of repentance which restores the original impulse to its intended goal.

Rav Kook elevated this moral principle to a universal law. Just as repentance is the striving within the individual to return to harmony and resolution, so all existence struggles to repair the fractures and tears which are visible in the world. Repentance and restoration are as vital for moral perfection as they are for the perfection of the world. In Rav Kook's mystical understanding, the "tear" which permeates this system is, indeed, the cause of all pain and chaos and yet, paradoxically, it is a necessary stage in the unfolding of divine perfection. The dichotomies of good and evil, perfection and destruction, are only apparent. In fact, all phenomena are

extensions and phases of essentially divine matters. In their translation from divine perfection to worldly manifestation, something is tragically, but not hopelessly, lost.

Rav Kook's greatest contribution to Jewish thought is his application of the dialectical theory of existence to the phenomena of Jewish history. All things proceed from God in a continuous chain of being so that both good and evil are necessary and integral aspects of existence. The expressions of the religious spirit of Judaism, influenced by these patterns of dislocation and restoration, are subject to oscillations of descent and ascent, growth and decay, and what appears to be destructive may yet be constructive. The human inclination to sin, for example, serves the ultimate purpose of generating a passion which can be channeled towards the proper action. Likewise, those times which appear to be low points in the cycle of the nation's history may also serve a higher purpose. Rav Kook suggests that the long periods of exile presented the Jewish people with certain intellectual and spiritual challenges that could stimulate a national process of redefinition and, ultimately, restoration. He states boldly, much to the chagrin of others, that atheism performed a necessary function when it confronted Judaism and challenged it to examine and redefine some of its more mythic and anthropomorphic expressions of God. In their zeal to preserve the original character of Judaism, the orthodox assumed a defensive stance in the face of the challenge of the dominant cultural values of the period. According to Rav Kook, this only served to isolate the Jewish religion from the healthy winds of challenge while secular culture advanced alone. Moreover, the challenge persisted and many of the best Jewish minds were alienated from the tradition. The challenge, as Rav Kook saw it, was as necessary as the endurance of the tradition.

The Zionist movement in the twentieth century was the product of a predominantly secular ideology. Many of its adherents had made the break in theory and practice from the Jewish religious tradition. To Rav Kook, the young Zionists represented not so much a threat to traditional Judaism as a necessary challenge to the spiritual condition of Judaism. Their activism meant no less than the revitalization and restoration of Judaism through a new twist in the universal process of exile and return. Political Zionism served the highest purpose of repairing the fracture which had permeated Judaism throughout the periods of exile by restoring the spirit of the Jewish people to the physical base of its existence. Rav Kook elevated the secular activity of Zionism to the level of a religious obligation which performs a restorative function within Judaism.

During his tenure as Chief Rabbi of Palestine, he was often criticized by his orthodox compatriots for his extreme tolerance of the secular Zionists. In explaining his apparent liberalism, he resorted to a parable regarding the building of the Holy of Holies. Although only the High Priest was permitted to enter the inner sanctum after its completion, all

classes of workmen were needed to construct the edifice. Common laborers, masons, and carpenters were needed to build the sanctuary although, ultimately, when their work was completed and the structure acquired a new character of holiness, they were prohibited from entering it. In similar fashion, he explained, all types of Jews contributed to the construction of the new homeland and were equally vital in the process of the restoration of Judaism.

Rav Kook sought to define a mode of religious faith which reached beyond the particular and exclusive claims of orthodox, religious Judaism in pursuit of universal values and ideals. Throughout his writings, he claims that the highest sensibility of the Jewish soul is the quest for universality which has been expressed in many diverse forms in Jewish history. For him, the return to Zion was the concrete manifestation of the more subtle process of gathering the dispersed forms of Jewish moral, intellectual, and spiritual expression and the reunification of the Jewish spirit with the source of its inspiration. In this venture, all bearers of the spirit, like the workmen in the sanctuary, perform an equally vital role.

Ben Zion Bokser's anthology of Rav Kook's writings gives the English reader access to the world of this modern spiritual master. Rabbi Bokser has chosen his selections carefully, translated them from Hebrew faithfully and with style, and arranged them in logical sequence of development. The volume begins with a preface by Jacob Agus who, with broad strokes, draws the historical context of Jewish thought in which Rav Kook appears. In a second preface, Rivka Schatz, a leading scholar of Jewish mysticism at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, locates Rav Kook as a modern thinker whose vision looks towards the existential dilemmas of Jewish life and not backwards to the medieval Jewish mystical tradition. Ben Zion Bokser's lucid and learned introduction to the translation rounds out the figure of Rav Kook as a man striving to integrate his personal mystical longings with the demands of religious leadership in pre-State Palestine.

Bokser points to the universalist strain as the dominant theme in these writings. The highest expression of the human spirit, he recalls, is the "yearning to reveal the unity of the world, in man, among nations, and in the entire content of existence." Yet, we search in vain through Rav Kook's writings for an explanation of the content and meaning of this unified vision. Like all mystics, Rav Kook leads us along with him in his search for unity but disappoints us when we ask him to tell us what he means. His experience of universality is a private revelation which he can advocate but never really share.

In the translations which follow, Bosker presents selections from the ethical treatises, *The Light of Penitence* and *The Moral Principles*, in which Rav Kook expounds his Kabbalistic notion of penitence as restoration of the discordant universe. The next section of meditations and brief essays is from *The Lights of Holiness*. In terse passages which constitute the clearest

and most concise expressions of his thought, the spontaneity and consistency of Rav Kook's vision are apparent. In the essay, "A Holiness That Destroys and a Holiness That Builds," he develops his radical understanding of the dialectic of constructive and destructive forces operating in Jewish history. He presents his philosophy of religion in "The Pangs of Cleansing," and his philosophy of history in "The Road to Renewal." In his seminal essay, "Fragments of Light," he presents a major statement on the relation of Jewish law to life. These selections conclude with examples of his mystical poetry and with excerpts from his extensive correspondence.

Rav Kook's writings are replete with the signature of earlier intellectual and religious influences. He draws widely from rabbinic literature, Yehudah Halevi, Maimonides, the Zohar, Lurianic Kabbalah, Hasidism, Haskalah (Enlightenment) literature, Kant, and Schopenhauer. Most readers, however, are unfamiliar with these sources and will suffer from the absence of explanatory notes or comments accompanying the translations. Rav Kook, indeed, can be read as a universal thinker whose teachings transcend the particular idiom of Judaism or as a Jewish mystic whose universal vision is inseparable from the Kabbalistic language in which he wrote. The editor stresses the universal quality in these writings and consistently passes over, and occasionally mistranslates, the Kabbalistic nuances which pervade these essays and poems. The reader should be aware that this dimension of Rav Kook's thought is given minimal consideration in this volume.

Ben Zion Bokser's comprehensive anthology of Rav Kook's writings captures the generous spirit of the man, his dedication to the rebirth of the nation, and the universal longings of his mystic soul. The appearance of this handsomely designed volume in "The Classics of Western Spirituality" series of the Paulist Press is fitting, if not ironic, recognition of the prominence and resonance of the mystical tradition in Judaism. With the publication of extensive and representative selections from the large corpus of Rav Kook's writings, Rabbi Bokser has made the thought of a major figure in the Jewish mystical tradition accessible to students, scholars, and laymen. He presents the reader with a challenging and rewarding encounter with one of the classic figures of Jewish, if not Western, spirituality.



## Answers to Questions

*Erez-Israel in the Responsa Literature.* Compiled and edited by ISRAEL SCHEPANSKY. Hebrew, 3 volumes. Jerusalem. Mosad Harav Kook, 1966-1979.

Reviewed by SAMUEL N. HOENIG

THE CENTRALITY of the land of Israel in Judaism is undeniable. Thrice daily, Jews turn towards Jerusalem to pray for the rebuilding of that "City of Peace" and for the return of the divine presence to Zion. The Jews' romance with Erez-Israel penetrates the very depths of Judaism's heart and soul.

*Erez-Israel in the Responsa Literature* by Israel Schepansky is an impressive collection of source material, spanning a period of twelve centuries, and dealing with this centrality and the love affair between the Jew and his homeland. The material consists of responsa and letters, of an extremely technical nature, all dealing with topics pertaining to the land of Israel. The medium of responsa dates as far back as the Talmud itself and is an invaluable source for halakhah. Indeed, it is this ongoing process of *she'elah* and *teshuvah* (question and answer) which has demonstrated the viability of Jewish law — that halakhah is neither stagnant and static, nor incapable of coping with contemporary living. However, the responsa literature is not limited to halakhah, but serves as an important source for the scientific study of history and sociology. It is this multi-faceted usage of the responsa which has guided Schepansky in his selection and structuring of the various *teshuvot*.

*Erez-Israel in the Responsa Literature* is a three-volume work that chronicles events and facts pertain-

ing to the Land from early Gaonic times (8th century C.E.) to the present. Each volume is divided into four sections: (1) Prominence of Israel and Jerusalem, (2) *Hilkhot Erez-Israel*, (3) Midrash and Aggadah, (4) Historical Material. For most of the responsa the author provides historical background and biographical data in addition to documentation and elucidating notations. In fact, Schepansky's extensive notes serve as a commentary to the text. (This is especially true in his analysis of the famous responsum detailing the halakhic differences between the Babylonian and Palestinian schools.) His comments and insights are both highly original and convincing, throwing light on many unresolved difficulties. For example, the explanation of the popular use of the name *Geon Ya'akov* by *yeshivot* in Israel is most interesting. Schepansky indicates that the phrase is actually of Babylonian origin, rooted in Amos 8:7, where the prophet alludes to the Temple as the "pride of Jacob" (*Geon Ya'akov*). In accordance with the Talmud, *Megillah* 29a, the *yeshivot* of Babylonia were referred to as "sanctuaries" (vol. 1, p. 54).

Rabbi Schepansky's treatment of the famous "Saadia-Ben Meir controversy" concerning the calendar, as presented in volume one, is based on some of the latest discoveries from the Cairo Genizah. Likewise, in dealing with the "Semikhah Controversy" between Levi b. Habib of Jerusalem and Ya'akov be'Rav of Safed (16th century C.E.) the author presents hitherto unknown documents in addition to correcting the many textual errors of the Venice 1565 edition of *Kuntres ha-Semikhah*.

With the advent of the Hovevei Zion movement and the birth of the

State of Israel, religious Jewry was confronted with many halakhic problems which previously had been academic. It is in volume three of *Erez-Israel in the Responsa Literature* that many of these queries are dealt with. The author has collected a complete compendium of responsa dealing with the question of the re-institution of the sacrificial order, the problems concerning the religious observance of Israel Independence Day, warfare on the Sabbath, and the mizvah of settling in Israel today.

However, this reviewer cannot help but feel that volume three of the series falls short of the two previous ones. Not only is the commentary less generous, but it appears as if the author-editor tried to crowd as much material as possible into this final installment. Such a monumental undertaking of cataloging the various responsa pertaining to the land of Israel cannot be limited to merely two thousand pages. Indeed, Schepansky himself, in the introduction to the last volume, explains that, due to technical and financial reasons, the projected six-volume work had to be cut in half.

Structurally, the author has arranged his material chronologically so that the same topics are frequently discussed numerous times under their respective periods. For instance, the mizvah of living in Is-

rael is twice discussed in volume one and again in volume three. This technique creates a certain splinter effect. Inasmuch as it is the style of many respondents to develop their opinions based upon those of their predecessors, perhaps it would have been more practical to deal with the material topically — covering a single subject all at one time. Furthermore, the fourth section entitled “Historical Material in the Responsa” is ambiguous. Most responsa do not deal outwardly with questions of Jewish history. Rather, they are legal writings which only incidentally contain useful historical data. However, many of the responsa listed as “historical” are no more so than any of the others, but are basically halakhic and legalistic. This is especially true of those in section four of volumes two and three.

Nevertheless, the above criticisms are in no way intended to detract from the over-all breadth and depth of the work. Rabbi Schepansky is uniquely qualified to deal with the material, being both a *talmid hakham* and an erudite scholar. The volumes are an ideal source book for the study of Erez-Israel in particular and responsa literature in general.

SAMUEL N. HOENIG is assistant professor of *Judaic Studies*, Touro College, New York.

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